

# JEEVADHARA

## The People of God

CATHOLIC CHURCH : COMMUNION OF CHURCHES  
CHURCH OF THE THOMAS CHRISTIANS OF INDIA

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# LEELADHARA

## CONTENTS

	<i>Pages</i>
Editorial	271
Individual Churches: the Biblical Perspective <i>Mathew Vellanickal</i>	274
The Ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians of India <i>Xavier Koodapuzha</i>	290
The Post-Diamperitan Developments in the Church in India <i>Thomas Pallipurathukunnel</i>	309
Discussion Forum <i>P. T. Chacko</i>	334

# Editorial

The rediscovery of the nature of the Church as the communion of individual Churches is generally considered to be a remarkable achievement of Vatican II. The concept of the communion of Churches leads us to a more intimate relationship with the early Church where this idea was a living reality. In the light of the teaching of Vatican II we have now a clearer picture of the local Churches which can no more be considered as administrative units of the universal Church. A local Church is the Church of Christ which is locally realized.

This issue of *Jeevadharma* is a continuation of the study of the issue No. 40 of 1977 on the topic: "Catholic Church: Communion of Churches". The study on the communion of Churches should necessarily lead us to the heritage of the different individual Churches. In this issue, therefore, the topics are mainly centred on the individual Church of the Thomas Christians of India.

In order to avoid any kind of ambiguity we find it necessary to clarify the terminology which we have followed. By the expression *local* Church is meant the Church relating to a particular place (*locus* = local). A *particular* Church is a partial unit of an individual Church, e. g. a diocese of an individual Church. An *individual* Church is a Church which has its own individuality or identity from the Christ-experience of an apostle which has developed into a specific style of ecclesial life with its own spiritual, liturgical, disciplinary and hierarchical heritage.

The Church of the Thomas Christians of India is an individual Church which is as old as Christianity itself. Unfortunately the ecclesiological heritage of this ancient Church yet remains to be explored. A historico-ecclesiological study is essential for an adequate understanding of her heritage. The heritage of every individual Church belongs to the Catholic heritage of the universal Church. Hence the various topics of this issue are centred on

the heritage of this individual Church of the St. Thomas Christians of India.

The ancient Church of the Thomas Christians was one in faith and tradition till the sixteenth century when the Portuguese colonizers reached India. Missionaries from the West accompanied them. Two Latin dioceses were established in Goa (1534) and Cochin (1558) respectively. Colonial interests mixed with the ambition for religious jurisdictional hegemony paved the way for conflicts with the Thomas Christians. The Portuguese wanted to bring the Thomas Christians under them, politically and ecclesiastically. Might was right, and they succeeded in prevailing over these Christians! From 1599 upto 1896, for a period of nearly three centuries, the Latin Bishops *rulled over* the Oriental Church of India. It was, surprisingly, a period of internal divisions and conflicts. Legitimate resistance against this state of affairs was branded schism and heresy! Meanwhile this ancient Church was gradually losing its identity. Finally, in 1896, as an outcome of the struggle, indigenous Bishops were appointed, but the same atmosphere of alienation was maintained through the clerical formation which continued to be under the Religious Orders of the Latin Church. This situation has not yet disappeared. The clergy who constitute the leadership in the Church are being trained in institutions without any indigenous ecclesial experience. The liturgy, history, spirituality etc., which are proper to the Oriental Churches of India, do not, unfortunately, form part of the curriculum of seminaries. No wonder if leadership, with the training which is given in the seminaries, fails to understand and appreciate the heritage of the Indian Church.

In this issue the articles are mainly centred on the Church of the Thomas Christians. The first article by Mathew Vellankal makes a brief analysis of the notion of the individuality of Churches. In this background Xavier Koodapuzha deals with some of the aspects of the ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians of India. It is followed by P. T. Chacko's article\* on the origin of Christianity in India: a study based on certain philosophical

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\* As this article has a direct relation to an article published in *Jeevadhara* 37 (pp. 17-85), it is relegated to "Discussion Forum" (General Editor).

considerations. The last article by Thomas Pallipurathukunnel gives a documentary survey of the background of the disastrous divisions of the Church of the Thomas Christians. It helps us to understand the various vicissitudes which influenced the course of the history of this Church.

This number of *Jeevadhara* is mainly intended to help towards an understanding and appreciation of the Indian ecclesial heritage. The heritage of the individual Churches belong to the universal Church. Hence this study on the origin and heritage of the Church of Thomas Christians is expected to broaden our vision of the catholicity of the Church which is many a time identified with the western ecclesial heritage.

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# Individual Churches: the Biblical Perspective

The New Testament Church, with its origins in Jesus Christ, is already the Church in the fulness of her nature. We can see there the original design of the Church. The New Testament message, as the original testimony, is the highest court of appeal for all the changes of history. This does not mean that we have to copy it today slavishly, without any regard to the lapse of time and our constantly changing situations. We have to translate the original design of the Church into the changing images and structures, which reflect it in modern terms.

## **The universal Church : a communion of individual Churches**

A quick glance at the Church in the New Testament will show that it is a communion of different individual Churches. It is not a highly centralized organization of the monarchical pattern but a fellowship of different Churches taking root in different places and peoples.

A survey of the use of the term *Ecclesia*, the Greek word for the Church in the New Testament, will help us to get this vision of the Church. Out of the total 114 occurrences of the word, the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles account for 85.

## **Acts of the Apostles**

The term 'ecclesia' is used, first of all, about the Church in Jerusalem (Cf. Acts 5: 11; 8: 1). In Acts 9: 31 the word in the singular is used not merely for the Jerusalem community, but for that of all Judea, Galilee and Samaria as a whole (There is also a textual variant which uses the word in the plural). When referring to the Church in different places it is used in the plural (*ecclesiai*) in 15: 41 and 16: 5). Elsewhere the singular is predominant, whether used for the community in Jerusalem (11: 22; 12: 15), the one at Syrian Antioch (13: 1; 11: 26; 14: 27; 15: 3), or that of Caesarea (18: 22) or Ephesus (20: 17, 28).

From these usages in Acts, we see that the Christian community, in different places, is simply called 'ecclesia' with no question of precedence or correlation. The local connection as such does not seem to be the decisive point. It is also to be noted that the singular and plural are used promiscuously. Therefore it is not one Church that divides up into Churches. Nor does the sum total of the Churches produce the Church. The one Church is present in the places mentioned. Another important point is that the same word is used for the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem and the Gentile Christian community in Antioch.

### **Pauline Epistles**

In the Epistles of Paul we find the same usage as in the Acts of the Apostles. Christians, Jewish and Gentile, do not differ in this matter. Individual Churches stand alongside one another. The plural and the singular are used interchangeably. In Gal 1: 13 Paul tells us that he persecuted the Church. But then in 1: 22 he describes this as the 'Churches of Judea' (cf. also 1 Cor, 10: 32 and 11: 16).

Often the place is mentioned but differently such as: "the Church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor 1: 2; 2 Cor 1: 1), and "the Church of the Thessalonians in God" (1 Thes 1: 1; 2 Thes 1: 1). Sometimes it is the district that is mentioned such as: "the Churches of Asia" (1 Cor 16: 19) "the Churches of Galatia" (1 Cor 16: 1; Gal 1: 2) and "the Churches of Judea" (Gal 1: 22). Even so small a fellowship as a house Church is called an 'ecclesia' (Rom 16: 5). Such a fellowship is numbered along with larger communities. 1 Cor 16: 19 says "The Churches of Asia send greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the Church in their house, send you hearty greetings". This shows that each community, however small, represented the total community, the Church. The expression 'the Church that is in Corinth' (1 Cor 1: 2; 2 Cor 1: 1) is meaningful. It is not the Corinthian Church which would stand side by side with the Roman Church etc. but "the Church as it is in Corinth".

### The Church of God

We never find ornamental epithets for the Church. The only attribute, if it may be called that, is the genitive *tou Theou* meaning 'of God'. Even when it is not explicitly mentioned, it is to be understood as such, because that is what helps us to appreciate the full significance of the church. It is added both to the singular (1 Cor 1: 2; 10: 32; 15: 9) and to the plural (1 Cor 11: 16; 1 Thes 2: 14). This shows, first of all, that the usual distinction that we make between the Universal Church as 'the Church of God' and the local Churches simply as local communities belonging to the Church of God is not supported by the New Testament. The One who is at work in, and with, the Church, local or universal, is always God. 1 Cor 12: 28 says: "God has appointed, in the Church, first, apostles, second, prophets, and third, teachers..." The Church (es) of God always stands in contrast to other forms of society. What is decisive is not that some assemble, or something assembles, but who or what assembles. The explicit or implicit addition 'of God' tells us who assemble to make them. To the Church belong all those who are God's own (cf. Acts 20: 28). This is not a quantitative term, but a qualitative one. For the assembly of God's people, it is not the size that matters. It is in being or it exists when God gathers His own. And in fact it exists inasmuch as God gathered and gathers His own.

### The Church of Christ

Since God acts in and through Christ, Christ is also mentioned in some passages referring to the Church. 1 Thes 2: 14 speaks of the "Churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea". Gal 1: 22 speaks of "the Churches of Christ in Judea". Surely we cannot translate *en Christo* (in Christ) by the colourless adjective 'Christian'. Paul is not referring merely to a Christian Church, beside which there may be others. He is referring to the assembly of God in Christ, namely, the assembly of the New Covenant constituted by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### The individual Church is the Church of God

The individual Church is not a part, or administrative unit, of the universal Church. It is the full presence and mani-

festation of the Church of Christ in a particular people. Nothing in the New Testament allows us to make a distinction between Churches in a house, in a town and in a region. They are all 'the Church'. An individual Church never appears as part of a whole which possesses the fulness. The Church does not exist as a vast universal system. On the contrary, the Universal Church is the communion of the individual Churches and, strictly speaking, has no concrete existence outside these individual Churches. The individual Church does and must contain the whole mystery of the Church.

### **Local, particular and individual Churches**

Here we need a clarification as regards the terms 'local', 'particular' and 'individual', referring to the Church. This is necessary not only in view of the use of these terms in this article but also because of the confusion that exists, at present, among theologians about them. 'Local Church' is a generic term which can be applied to any realization of the Church at a given place: in a house, town, region, state or a nation. Thus we can speak of the Kerala Church or the Indian Church, etc. The individual Church results from the verification of the Apostolic Christ-experience in a people, taking a specific form of life, spiritual heritage, worship, liturgy and ecclesiastical discipline, which is integrated into the socio-cultural milieu of that people. It is also called a rite (Cf. Vat. II decree on Eastern Churches, para 2-4). A particular Church is the eparchial unit of this individual Church (part of a whole) under the leadership of a hierarch of its own, who is in communion with the hierarchy of the individual Church. A particular Church is also called a diocese (cf. Vat. II document on the Church, para 27).

### **Church: the body of Christ**

Explicit statements concerning the 'ecclesia' are found in the Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and the Ephesians. In Col 1: 24 the 'ecclesia' is the 'soma Christou', the body of Christ. In Col. 1: 18 Christ is the 'kephale', the head of this body. Similar statements are found in Eph 1: 22 and 5: 23. It is worth noting that in Eph 3: 21 and 5: 32 'Christ' and the 'Church' are mentioned in juxtaposition.

The reference seems to be to co-ordination and subordination. The figurative language is not strictly logical. Christ is the Church herself (the body). Yet Christ is also above the Church as her head. Obviously the statements are closely interwoven. If, according to Rom 12: 4 f and 1 Cor 12: 12f, Christians as (members of) the body stand in relation to one another, it is in Christ that this relation exists. It is no mere human fellowship. One can never grasp the nature or meaning of the assembly of God in Christ in terms of a sociologically defined concept of society. The decisive point is the fellowship with Christ. He is the head, of whose body the Church is.

In this figure we can see the illustration of the description that the Universal Church is the communion between the individual Churches. Christ is immanent in each individual Church, and therefore, each individual Church is the body of Christ. Saul who persecuted the Church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria, persecuted Christ (cf. Acts 9: 1-6). However, the body of Christ is not exhausted by one or another individual Church. As Christ is also the head transcending the body, the Church also transcends the individual Churches. Whereas the individual Church is wholly the Church, it is not the whole Church. The mystery of the Church is both immanent and transcendent. It is immanent in each individual Church, but it also transcends it. Therefore, an individual Church that turns in upon herself, would defeat the very purpose of her existence. She realizes the mystery of the Church in so far as she remains open to the transcendent Church by being in communion with other individual Churches.

## Teaching of Vat. II

This is the underlying concept of para 2 of the Decree of the Second Vatican Council on Eastern Catholic Churches where we read, "That Church, Holy and Catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, from separate Churches or rites. Between these, there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the Church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it. For it is the mind of the Catholic

Church that each Individual Church or rite retain its traditions whole and entire, while adjusting its way of life to the various needs of time and place".

### **The nature of the Church**

Once we have established the fact that the Universal Church is the communion of individual Churches, we can proceed further and ask about the essentials of the individual Church. What is an individual Church? Are there decisive elements that go to the making of an individual Church? If so, what are these elements? Can there be variety in these elements?

### **Institutional and structural element?**

When we look at the picture of the early Churches as found in the New Testament, it is surprising to notice that there is very little interest in the ecclesiastical institutional and structural elements. In fact the New Testament presents a variety of Church structures. The Church of Jerusalem had a collegial structure. Its members gathered round the Twelve, listened to their teachings, brought the proceeds of the sale of their possessions and placed it at the feet of the Apostles (cf. Acts 2: 42-45; 4: 34-35). But in Acts 11: 30 it was elders who represented the Church of Jerusalem and in Acts 15: 2, 4-6 it is both elders and apostles. In Antioch there was a leadership of prophets and teachers (Acts 13: 1-2). In Ephesus, the Church was governed by "elders" (Acts 20: 17) who are also called "bishops" (Acts 20: 18).

The New Testament thus offers a variety of institutional set-ups and structures. Therefore the Church can take any structure that does not go against its nature as the Church of God in which the enduring reality of the saving act, which God accomplished in Jesus Christ, is present. It is in this that we find the unity in the Church in spite of the variety in its structures. Every individual Church has to be the realization of the Christ-event in the life of particular people. It is the dynamic presence of God Incarnate through his Son Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. It is the paschal experience of the risen Lord in the lives of a particular people. It is the Apostles' unique encounter with, and experience of, the Risen Lord that gather the

members of the Church into God's assembly of the New Covenant. The realization of the Church depends on the realization of a personal and vital experience of the Risen Christ by a people, as a result of which they are united in Christ and find meaning in their existence in Him. This is what gives unity to the Church.

### **The decisive elements of an individual Church**

Luke, the theologian of the Church, gives the outline of his theology at the very outset of his second book, the Acts of the Apostles: "So when they had come together they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1: 6-8). Here we have a description of the time of the Church, which is a time between the time of Christ and the End. The purpose of that time is to have the witness of Christ carried to the ends of the world by the community of the disciples led by the 'apostles', and the power behind their witness will be the Spirit. In this description of the time of the Church we have a clear indication that the Church is a community of disciples bearing witness to the Risen Lord and his Gospel. Therefore it is the process of evangelization that is the *raison d'être* of the Church. "Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists order to evangelize" (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).

### **Preaching, making disciples and witnessing**

The words of the missionary commissioning in the Synoptic Gospels, namely Mk 16: 14-16; Mt 28: 18-20 and Lk 24: 47-49, which reflect the life of the Early Church show how the process of evangelization is decisive for the existence of the Church. The three texts reflect the process of evangelization which gradually became identified with the process of the formation of the individual Churches.

Among the three Synoptic texts Mk 16: 14-16 seems to manifest an older stage of composition. Even if it is from th

later Markan addition, and may be somewhat assimilated to Markan ways of expression as regards details, it is on the whole an independent and comparatively ancient witness. The commission is given to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation. The word *kerussein* means 'proclamation' and occurs rather frequently in Mk (14 times). Evangelization in the early Church is expressed mostly by the use of this term which refers to preaching the Gospel. The fact that it does not occur at all in the writings of John, and that the words *marturein* and *marturia* are preferred by John ('*marturein*' and '*marturia*' occur in the Johannine Writings 77 times, but in Mt once, in Mk three times, in Lk twice, in Acts twelve times and in Paul ten times) shows that there is a shift of emphasis in evangelization. By the time of John, those who, through preaching, had come to believe in the Gospel had established themselves as a community of believers, namely, the Church. After that evangelization had to be realized also through the life witness of the Church.

Perhaps traces of this shift can be seen in Mt 28:18-20, where we have the word *mathetheuein* instead of *kerussein*. '*Mathetheuein*' refers to 'discipleship'. 'To be a disciple' is, for Mt, to be attached to the person of Christ, in whom the life of the Triune God is made present, and to lead a life fulfilling the will of the Father in heaven (Mt 12:48-50). Through baptism one is introduced into this life and fellowship of the Father, Son and Spirit, and all those who are thus initiated form the community that is the Church. The words in v. 20, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you", show that the reference is to a new way of life into which the believers are initiated through baptism. This results in the proclamation of the Gospel in the life-style of the Church, which consequently give rise to the idea of 'witnessing' which is the concrete form that evangelization takes in Lk and Jn: "You are witnesses of these things" (Lk 24:48).

If the process of evangelization results in the formation and growth of the Church the elements at work in evangelization are also decisive.

### **The Church and apostolic Christ-experience**

In all the Gospels the missionary commissioning is connected with the living encounter of the Apostles with the Risen Christ

and their experience of Him. The Church is to be traced back to the ministry of the unique witness of the Apostles as its origin (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4). Therefore it has to be in permanent harmony with their decisive testimony. It is in this context that we have to understand Paul's preoccupation to link his encounter with, and experience of, the Risen Lord with that of the Twelve. Therefore every individual Church, to be authentic, has to be faithful to this apostolic testimony. The apostolic succession belongs to the whole Church and has manifested itself in manifold ways throughout the centuries and in all countries in the continuous process of baptizing and being baptized, through faith, and obedience to the apostolic testimony, through the community of worship and in the Eucharist and in the fellowship and unity of the Churches of the whole world. This inter-relationship through the apostolic succession is of a spiritual as well as a historical character. It is not only a succession of persons, but a succession of faith and its profession. It is primarily a question of awakening again and again the faith that was first awakened through the original testimony of the Apostles, and of making this faith known in the Church.

### **The Church and service of the Word**

Another decisive element of the Individual Church is the sharing of the Christ – experience through the proclamation of the Word made relevant to the concrete situations of the lives, religious needs, aspirations and struggles of the people. As soon as they were filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles began to speak (Acts 2:4). Their main role is to continue to be the service of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). It was those who received the Word who were baptized and formed the first Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41). Every member of the Church preached the Word when the opportunity arose (Acts 4:34; 8:4).

The service of the Word is carried out in different ways. It is the word of teaching (Acts 2:42); the word which is carried in the heart and meditated upon, as illustrated in the case of Mary (Lk 2:15-50). It is the word resounding in joy and praise in the prayer of the Church (Acts 2:44; 8:5-8; 13:48; 16:34). It is also the word of the Scripture, coming to new life and plentitude in the Christ-event and the Spirit-filled activity of the Church (Acts 2:15-21; 4:25-28; 8:32-35 etc.).

In whatever form the Word reaches her, the Church lives by the Word and finds her identity in ministering to it. It is practically identical with the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that "The Word grew" or "increased" or "was strengthened" in places where actually it is a reference to the growth or 'increase' of the Church (Acts 6: 7; 11: 24; 13: 49; 19: 20). This identification of the Word with the Church can be compared with the identification of the Logos with Christ in Jn 1. Whatever the Logos meant and stood for was present in Christ: "The Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1: 14). In the same way the deepest identity of the Church is to be found in the Word and its power. The Church is always at the service of the Word and is carried forward herself by the power of the Word.

### **The Spirit: the Animator of the Church**

It is the Spirit that is the power behind evangelization. In Jn 20: 21-22, the sending of the disciples was accompanied by the giving of the Spirit. In Lk 24: 49, Jesus asks the disciples to stay in the city until they are clothed with power from on high.

The early Church's conviction of the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, and of the operation of the Holy Spirit in her, is so evident from various points of view that this bond with God's Spirit is an essential feature of the individual Church. It is the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that marks the inauguration of the time of the Church (Acts 2: 1-47). He is the mainstay of the Church and her Animator. The Christian receives the Spirit and bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5: 22 f). The Spirit sent down on the early Church, and dwelling in the faithful (Rom 8: 9-11), is the Spirit of the Risen Lord who, as life-giving strength (1 Cor 15: 45), enters into the faithful and continues in them the work of redemption (Rom 8: 11). The Church is filled with the eschatological Spirit of God (1 Cor 3: 16 f), with a worship in Spirit and Truth (Jn 4: 23) and with spiritual sacrificial service (1 Pet 2: 5). The living Christ is her foundation and corner-stone and works in her through the Holy Spirit as the principle of her life and her building up (Eph 2: 20-22). Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord directs His earthly community, sends the Church preachers and pastors, and effects her building up and growth (Acts 9: 31; 20: 28; Eph 4: 11-16).

The witness of the Spirit undergirds the Apostolic witness (Acts 5:32). To reject this Apostolic witness is to reject the Spirit (Acts 7:51). The Spirit sends Paul and Barnabas on their mission (Acts 13:4) and guides their apostolic movements and orientations (Acts 16:6-7), as well as those of Philip (Acts 8:29-39). The leadership of Peter particularly mediates the promptings of the Spirit (Acts 5:3-9; 10:19; 11:12). In short, the whole life of the Church, her growth, her joys, her prophetical endowments, reflect the dynamism of the Spirit.

### **Spirit versus institution**

The Spirit means creativity, prophetic predictability and newness of life, while the community means order, tradition, usage and law. The Old Testament knew already a tension between the kingship and priesthood of the community, on the one hand, and the prophetic work of the Spirit on the other. The first letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians warns the Church of a similar tension: "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophecy but use discernment; take what is good and keep clear of any kind of evil" (5:19-21). The Spirit works through the Church and is given for the Church. Therefore the Church should be fully open to the Spirit in order to be the Church of God. The Spirit and the institution should interpenetrate and complement each other.

### **Community of fellowship**

The Christ-experience shared through the Apostolic testimony results necessarily in a life of fellowship which is again one of the essential features of the individual Church. "That which... was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen... the word of life... we testify to it and proclaim to you... so that you may have fellowship with us and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:1-3). The Church of Jerusalem as presented in the Acts of the Apostles is a community of fellowship (Acts 2:42). *Koinonia* (fellowship) becomes a favourite term to describe the living bond existing in the Church, expressed in a life of service and love. Thus the Church becomes the sacrament of unity by which the whole world will one day obtain its unity in Christ, which is now really and visibly present in the Church.

This fellowship should bind not only persons in one individual Church, but also individual Churches among themselves. Whereas the individual Church is wholly the Church, it is not the whole Church. She would defeat the purpose of her existence, if she turned in upon herself. As in the case of the Church's principle of identity and difference, the Spirit recognises the Spirit in other Churches and even outside the Churches and continually urges each individual Church to preserve communion with the others and to give itself in service and love to all men.

### **Diversification of the individual Churches**

The sharing of Apostolic Christ-experience through the proclamation of the Word, with the power of the Spirit, is also the basis of all individual Churches. It can take on, however, different expressions, resulting from the subject of that experience, on the one hand, and from the encounter with the world on the other. The sharing of the Christ-experience should be relevant to concrete life-situations. This has been the vocation of the Church ever since its beginning at Pentecost, when every nation heard the same good news and gave thanks in its own language. The very image of the Church is different in the different Books of the New Testament, which is certainly conditioned by the individual Churches, where the respective traditions were formed. For example, if, in Mk, the Church takes the form of a discipleship, in Mt it takes the form of the new people of God and a community of brethren. If in Lk and Acts we find an apostolic Church, in Jn the Church takes the form of a fellowship. It, in the Pauline Epistles, we have a Church which is more charismatic without much of a hierarchical emphasis, in the Pastoral Epistles we find a Church which is highly institutional. This Biblical pluralism of the image of the Church shows that the particular Christian experience of her in a certain place has to take on a particular form of life, worship, spirituality, discipline and hierarchical set up, integrated into the socio-cultural *milieu* of the people.

### **Apostolic Christ-experience and the individuality of the Churches**

A mere territorial difference is not at all decisive of an individual Church. It is the human rather than the territorial

element that has priority, though the territorial organization of a Church does have a meaning for an individual Church. All the Churches have to trace their origin to the Apostolic experience of the Risen Lord. The experience of the Risen Lord, presented by the different NT Writers, reflects the Christ-experience of the respective individual churches whom they represent. The Christ-experience represented by each N. T. Writing has an individuality of its own, which in its turn shows that the Church which is represented by it has its individuality which distinguishes it from the others.

As the development of the individual Church is linked with its origin, the original apostolic experience is decisive for its individuality and growth. The apostolic Christ-experience does not exist in the abstract but concretely in the particular liturgical, spiritual, disciplinary and socio-cultural expressions of faith. If the original apostolic Christ-experience remains a constituent of every individual Church through its cultural transmutation through the centuries, the growth of an individual Church, to be authentic, should be in harmony with those expressions of faith, through which the Apostolic Christ-experience is handed down to that Church.

### **The Spirit: the principle of unity and difference**

The Pentecost experience foreshadows the real nature of the growing Church in which the Spirit becomes the principle of unity and difference. There we find "men from every nation under heaven" who gave thanks for the good news which each of them heard in his own language" (Acts 2:5-12). It was the Spirit's call to men to take all languages and cultures into His unity without destroying their individuality and differences. It is the same call that is realized in the history of the Church, giving birth to so many individual Churches. This means that the Spirit gives the Church a unity which can absorb differences without obliterating them and a universality that is always concrete. The Spirit, as we saw, is the essential animator of the Church. It is when the relation of the Church to the Spirit is forgotten, that unity is replaced by uniformity. Hence an authentic growth of the Church is an organic growth in harmony with the particular expressions of faith inherited by each individual Church, and

made relevant to the concrete situations and religious needs and aspirations of that particular people.

### **The heritage of Christ's Universal Church**

The individual Churches, with their particular expressions of faith, constitute the heritage of Christ's Universal Church. Vat. II, in its Decree on the Eastern Churches, speaks of them as the heritage of the Universal Church. The sacred Synod exhorts the members of the Eastern Churches to "preserve their lawful liturgical rites and their established way of life" and adds that "these should not be altered except by way of an appropriate and organic development" (para 6). Those who do not respect the particular expressions of faith contributing to the individuality of a Church, in their search for change and adaptation, will find themselves among those who destroy the heritage of Christ's universal Church.

### **Individual Churches of India**

After this theological exposition of the individual Churches in general, a few concrete remarks are worth making about the Church in India. The Christ-experience as expressed in the Church of India is handed down to us through the three individual Churches: Latin, Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara. A genuine concern for the growth of the Church in India should impel all these individual Churches to appreciate each other and to help each other to preserve their particular apostolic heritages handed down to them in different ways.

This fact is to be taken into account in the process of adaptation and so-called Indianization. The process of Indianization which has a tendency to impose a uniform pattern of cultural and liturgical expression of Christian faith on the whole of India is blind to the fact of the ecclesial and cultural pluralism of India, which is the rich heritage of Christ's universal Church. Efforts at adaptation should safeguard the rich ecclesial heritage of the Churches in India, on the one hand, and take into account the cultural differences of the people on the other. It should imply a healthy synthesis of the traditional past and the existential present of India.

### **The bishop and the individual Church**

A diocese is only an administrative unit of an individual Church, and hence solidarity should exist between the bishop who is at the head of a diocese and the hierarchy of the individual Church to which he belongs. Apostolic succession is not only a succession of persons, but a succession of Christian faith. It is primarily a question of awakening again and again, the faith that first sprang from the original testimony of the apostles, and of making this faith known in this Church and relevant to the concrete situations of time and place. It is the hierarchy that should give leadership in this process. Each bishop exercises this role of leadership properly in so far as this solidarity exists between him and the hierarchy of his individual Church and he remains united with the faith of the Church as expressed in its ecclesial heritages. In this way the bishop remains the sign of the apostolic succession in the Church.

### **Individual Churches of India and evangelization**

As we saw above the process of evangelization is identical with the process of formation and growth of individual Churches. Therefore, genuine evangelization is possible only in the context of the realization of authentic individual Churches. For fulfilling the task of evangelization in India, an authentic growth of all the three individual Churches of India is indispensable. Therefore optimum conditions should be maintained for the proper and organic growth of all three. Since the growth of the individual Church depends on its evangelizational activity, full freedom should be given to the three individual Churches to go and preach the Gospel any time and anywhere in India, depending on their personnel and resources.

### **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion the following points are reiterated.

The Universal Church is the communion of the individual Churches and, strictly speaking, has no concrete existence outside them. The individual Church is not a part or administrative unit of the Universal Church. The mystery of the Church of Christ is fully immanent in each individual Church. It is also transcendent since one individual Church does not exhaust the

whole mystery of the Church but is open to, and in fellowship with, this mystery present in other individual Churches.

The process of the formation and growth of individual Churches is the same as that of evangelization. Hence the Christ-experience which the Apostles proclaimed through the Word, in the power of the Spirit, remains the decisive element in the individual Church. But this Christ-experience takes different expressions in its encounter with the world. While the Spirit remains the unifying principle, it is also creative of different expressions of the Christ-experience in terms of the life, theology, liturgy and discipline which differentiate one individual Church from another. These elements constitute the individuality of the Churches. Any genuine growth of the Church should be an organic one, namely, in harmony with the individuality of the Church.

The apostolic succession and leadership should be conceived in terms of the leadership or hierarchy of the individual Church rather than those of personal privilege or diocesan leadership. This apostolic leadership is meant to help the Church to grow in Christ-experience in accordance with the apostolic heritage of faith handed over to it with its specificity and individuality, rather than to build up and run institutions with maximum efficiency, thus fostering Christian life on a diocesan level, without any solidarity with the individual Church.

It is an obligation of the Church of India, which is heir to the heritage of the three Individual Churches, to foster the growth of all the three Churches with mutual appreciation and respect by creating optimum conditions for their full-fledged evangelizational activity which is the heart-beat of the life of the Church.

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# The Ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians of India

(A brief historico-ecclesiological analysis of some aspects)

Among the post-Vatican II developments in the Church, the introduction of parish councils, pastoral council, priests' senate etc. is generally hailed as an important event. They are introduced quite in tune with the spirit of decentralization and corresponsibility, envisaged by the Council. The Catholic Church, for the last few centuries, was being shaped in a monarchical mould. But as the Church is the community of the People of God, it was commonly felt that the communitarian dimension should be reflected in her organizational and administrative structures. The pastoral and parish councils etc. are the natural outcome of this rediscovery of the nature of the Church as the People of God.

As we examine the heritage of the Church of the Thomas Christians of India, which is as old as Christianity itself, we find some structures which were largely responsible for maintaining the spirit of unity and communion in the Church. The parish assemblies and general assemblies which were known as *palli-yogams* and *pothuyogams* played an effective role in ecclesial life. In a similar way there was the office of the archdeacons of India whose role kept the episcopacy free from the burden of administrative affairs. It enabled the bishops to dedicate themselves fully to the Gospel, to prayer and to celebrations of the sacraments. This study is inspired by art. 14-17 of the Decree on Ecumenism, and art. 1-6 of the Decree on the Oriental Churches of Vat. II:

“While thanking God that many Eastern sons of the Catholic Church, who are preserving this heritage and wish to express it more faithfully and completely in their lives, are already living in full commu-

nion with their brethren who follow the tradition of the West, this Sacred Synod declares that this entire heritage of *spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, in their various traditions, belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church.*<sup>1</sup>

The ecclesiology of the Thomas Christians of India still remains an area unexplored by ecclesiologists. It can be understood only in its historical background. The complex situation of India provided the background for the development of a distinctive style of ecclesial life. The spirituality, discipline, worship, and organizational structures of the St. Thomas Christians were intimately related to this background. They were of the same faith and rite till the sixteenth century. Now they are a divided Church. Consequently their ecclesial traditions have undergone certain changes, but despite the divisions, they still preserve some of their venerable traditions of earlier times.

## I. Historical background

It is the ancient tradition of the Church in India that St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Christ came to India in 52 AD, established Christian communities in a few places and finally died a martyr at Mylapore near Madras. This tradition is shared by the non-christians as well. Certain places are pointed out as the centres of the Apostle's activities.<sup>2</sup> There are families which can trace their Christian tradition to the Apostle. This tradition is shared also by the Fathers of the Church such as Gregory Nazianzen, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, Gregory of Tours, Isidore of Seville and many others<sup>3</sup>. It is not the purpose of this article to make a detailed analysis of the historicity of the apostolate of St. Thomas<sup>4</sup>. The Thomas Christians firmly believe that St. Thomas is the founder of their Church and it is because of him they are called the Christians of St. Thomas.

1) Vat. II, *Decree on Ecumenism* art. 17.

2) Koodapuzha X. *Church History* (ed), Kottayam 1974, pp. 103-113.

3) The testimonies of the Fathers are given by Fr. A. C. Perumalil, *The Apostles in India*, Patna, 1971, pp. 49-81.

4) The local traditions and the documentary evidences are given by C. V. Cherian, *A History of Christianity in Kerala*, Kottayam, 1973 pp. 1-53.

Their Church developed a style of ecclesial life which was conditioned by the socio-cultural, political and religious conditions of that period. Its liturgical and hierarchical relations with the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon are based on their Thomistic, linguistic, cultural and commercial affinities.

### a) Thomistic affinity

The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians is one of four which are connected with the Apostle. The Christ-experience of St. Thomas was their common apostolic heritage. They venerate St. Thomas as their common Father. The Church of Edessa believes that St. Thomas founded it through his disciple Addai. As a sign of this attachment to the Apostle Thomas they took a major portion of his relics from India to their land. On the other hand, the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (the capital of the Persian Empire and the head-quarters of the Chaldean Church) is connected with St. Thomas through Mari, Addai's disciple who was believed to have preached here. The Church of Persia proper (Iran) also claimed St. Thomas for its Apostle. Concerning the Thomas Christians of India, they firmly hold on to the belief in their direct evangelization by St. Thomas. His tomb at Mylapore is an added reason for their attachment to the Apostle.

This common Thomistic heritage of these four neighbouring Churches brought them into closer relations. The Apostle Thomas was their common Father and for this reason there was solidarity and mutual esteem among them. Their common apostolic identity paved the way for more intimate fellowship. Among these Churches the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon emerged as the organizational centre, mainly owing to the political importance of this place as the capital of the Persian Empire. The Seleucian Prelate began to be known as the Catholicos, or Patriarch.

Such was also the common trend within the Roman Empire. Rome, Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria, which were the centres of the civil administration of the Roman Empire, emerged as the ecclesiastical centres with Patriarchal sees. The term Metropolitan meant the Prelate of the Mother city. The Metropolitans gradually assumed the title of Patriarch with other Metropolitans under them.

### b) The linguistic affinity

Aramaic was the language used by Jesus and the Apostles. It was the ordinary language of Palestine. In the Lion Handbook to the Bible we read :

"The Aramaic language is closely related to Hebrew. Used for diplomacy as early as Senacherib's time (750-681 BC) it became the official language of the Persian Empire after about 550 BC. The Book of Daniel contains passages in Aramaic. In the New Testament times Aramaic, rather than Hebrew, was the ordinary language of Palestine. It is still spoken today by the villagers of Malloula in Syria".<sup>5</sup>

The Aramaic of Malloula has been much corrupted by the Turkish and Arabic languages. As the Aramaic language was the medium of Divine Revelation and evangelization the Christians had a predilection for it. This language which later came to be known as Syriac (after Syrus who ruled over Mesopotamia), began to be written in two scripts and pronounced in two ways, East Syriac and West Syriac. The East Syriac (Chaldean) retains the old pronunciation, which is that of Christ's time, as can be proved from such expressions as *Talitha qumi, raga, Eli Eli lama sabaqthani, haqel dama, Aba, Maran atha* etc. which are seen in the Bible in the original forms. "Christ's language was the form of Syriac which the Jews had learnt in the land of captivity and had brought to Palestine. It became so Jewish that it was called Hebrew and the Jews employed its letters for writing the real Hebrew. Some call it *Caldaic* (Chaldean or Chaldee) and even *Syro-Chaldaic, Syro- (Syriac)* being a common epithet used for some other forms of Aramaic also."<sup>6</sup> In the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (1952) "Chaldee" is defined as "biblical Syriac or Aramaic".

It was also the common language of commerce<sup>7</sup>. The Liturgical expert Joseph Abdreas Jungman explains how Greek,

5) *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*, Reprint of 1916, Herts, England, p. 87.

6) Placid J. Podipara, *The Rise and Decline of the Thomas Christians*, (MS) Rome, 1978, p. 3.

7) Dr. H. C. E. Zacharias, *The Church of St. Thomas and Bartholomew in Malabar*, 'Pax' Spring, 1926, Caldey, p. 12.

Latin and Syriac were the most important languages of the early centuries:

"During the early days of Christianity the three languages used in the inscription on the cross, Hebrew (*Syriac*), Greek and Latin, were of primary importance. With these one could make himself understood in any part of the world of the time."<sup>8</sup>

The adoption of another language for the liturgy was not a strange practice in the early Church. Until the fourth century the liturgical language of Rome was Greek. A similar attitude was possible in the Indian context, with the adoption of Syriac as the liturgical language.

This respect for the language of revelation is quite natural as is observable in other religious traditions. The respect which the Hindus show towards *Sanskrit*, their Vedic language, and the love and attachment the Moslems have for *Arabic* are clear examples of this religious attitude. In such a situation of the early centuries it was quite natural for the Thomas Christians of India to adopt a liturgy which used the Aramaic language. An added incentive must have been the fact that the other three Churches, with the same Thomistic heritage, had accepted it for their official form of worship.<sup>9</sup>

### c) The commercio-cultural affinity

There were vigorous commercial relations among these countries in which the Church was founded by St. Thomas or his

8) Jungmann J. A., article, 'Liturgy' in *Encyclopaedia of Theology*, London, 1975, p. 855.

9) A letter written from Malabar to Pope Gregory XIII contains the following statement: "Our prayers are in Syriac or the Chaldean language which was handed over to us by Our Lord St. Thomas, and we and our predecessors have been taught this language" Giamil S. Genuinae relationes inter sedem Apostolicam et Assyriorum Orientalium seu Chaldaeorum ecclesiam, Rome, 1902, Document XXII.

disciples. These paved the way for cultural relations. Dr. H. C. E. Zacharias says:

"The commercial relations between Chaldea and Malabar go back at least to the VIII century B.C. It is evident from the teak beams etc. found in the ruins of Chaldean Ur.... This intercourse continued down the century; for the 'Periplus' (written *circa AD* 90) reports that at the mouth of the Euphrates was the harbour of Apologus, where sandal wood, teak and ebony were imported from Barygaza (Broach) See Rawlinson's *Intercourse between India and the Western World*, Cambridge, 1916, p. 133<sup>10</sup>.

As we have seen the language of the Jews was Aramaic and they were in the forefront in commercial relations with India<sup>11</sup>. There were Jewish colonies in the Indian coastal regions. Aramaic was the commercial language throughout the East.

#### d) The Sumerio - Dravidian affinity

The Sumerians are not Semites. Ur was the capital of the Sumerians. Dr. Werner Keller says:

"Ur emerged from the shady past as the capital city of the Sumerians, one of the oldest civilizations in Mesopotamia. As we know the Sumerians are not Semites like the Hebrews."<sup>12</sup>

Historians and archaeologists do argue in favour of a close affinity between the Sumerian and Dravidian cultures. The common bodily features and linguistic heritage indicate that the Thomas Christians are mainly of Dravidian stock. The famous Indus valley civilization is regarded as Dravidian. The excavations made at Mohenjadarao, Harappa and Chambu have revealed elements of a common heritage

10) H. C. E. Zacharias op. cit. p. 19.

11) Marshall, *Guide to Taxilla*, Delhi, 1936, pp. 78-79 and XXXIII (a); Burnet, *Aramaic Inscriptions from Taxilla*, Journal of Asiatic History, 1945, pp. 340, 342; Couley, *First Aramaic Inscriptions from Taxilla*, ibid, p. 342-347.

12) Werner Keller, *The Bible History*, transl. by William Neil, London, 1914, pp. 43-44.

of Dravidians and Sumerians. The Biblical archaeologist William Foxwell makes the following observation:

"In 1921 the existence of a highly developed civilization in the early Indus valley was discovered; subsequent excavation at Harappa, Mohanjadaro and Chambu, done by Sir John Marshall and Ernest Mackay has accumulated a mass of detail and has clarified a chronological picture showing that the Indus culture culminated during the second half of the third millennium B. C., and disappeared well before the end of the same millennium. Strictly speaking this early civilization of India was no less dependent on the West than was the later Aryan culture, since there is close parallelism, and there are many specific points of identity, between it and the contemporary culture of Mesopotamia and Susiana."<sup>13</sup>

The teak beams etc. which are found in the ruins of Chaldean Ur indicate the relation with Malabar. Ur means town or village or place or residence. Ur has the same meaning in the Dravidian language of Tamil and also in Malayalam. There are many place names in Malabar and elsewhere with the suffix ur. The villages and the territories (temple states) under the government of the Hindu temples were called 'Uralma' and its leaders were called 'Uralmakar'.<sup>14</sup>

This historical background explains how the Thomas Christians of India maintained an intimate communion with the Chaldean (East Syrian) Church. Their relations were based on the Thomistic, linguistic, commercial and cultural affinity that existed among these four Churches. The East Syrian Liturgy was not

13) William Foxwell Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Garden City, New York, ed. 2, 1957, p. 30.

14) The Dravidian culture in India is pre-Aryan. There is a strange tendency now, especially among a group of Indian Christians, to identify Indian culture with Aryan culture. The Thomas Christians of Malabar are fundamentally of Dravidian stock. Their language, Malayalam, is Dravidian.

regarded as something alien but, on the contrary, as, to a large extent, the common expression of their Thomistic, linguistic and cultural heritage.

## II Hierarchical development

The organizational developments in the Church were always conditioned by socio-cultural and political factors. The hierarchical organization within the Roman Empire followed a specific pattern as Christianity had become the official religion of the Empire<sup>15</sup>. But Christianity outside the Roman Empire had to face a quite different socio-political situation. Seleucia-Ctesiphon was the capital of the Persian Empire and it included Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia proper (Iran). The political importance of Seleucia-Ctesiphon paved the way for its ecclesiastical emergence and centralization. Though the bishops of Persia proper objected to such a claim<sup>16</sup>, they too gradually accepted the Seleucian leadership.

By 424 The Seleucian Metropolitan asserted his full independence of the 'Western Fathers' (of Edessa and Antioch)<sup>17</sup>. Here we see an instance of how the Persian Church, though founded by St. Thomas himself, accepted the leadership of the Seleucian see which was founded only by a disciple of St. Thomas. Such was the case within the Roman empire also. The imperial provincial capitals such as Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople, emerged as the principal patriarchal centres.

The Thomas Christians of India do not seem to have had the facilities to develop their own ecclesiastical organization<sup>18</sup>. The socio-cultural relations with the Persian Church which was

15) Koodapuzha, Xavier, 'The Structural Evolution in the Church', *Jeevadharma*, 1971, pp. 315-32.

16) Podipara P. J., *The Thomas Christians*, London, 1970, p. 38.

17) Cfr. Francis Dvornik, *National Churches and the Church Universal*, Westminister, 1943, p. 12.

18) G. T. McKenzie, *Christianity in Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1904, p. 4. McKenzie quotes the report of Peter du Jarric SJ according to whom, from the time of the apostle St. Thomas, there was a Metropolitan see in India.

also founded by the same Apostle prompted them to form part of the ecclesiastical organization of the Seleucian Church, maintaining their own ecclesial identity.

By 8th century the Bishop of the Thomas Christians had the Metropolitan title<sup>19</sup>. During the time of the Chaldean Patriarch Timothy I (780/89-823) there are evidences of the elections of the Metropolitan made by the people of India in the presence of the suffragan Bishops. They were expected to get the confirmation or approbation of their election from the Chaldean Patriarch. It is an indication that there were many bishops here to elect their Metropolitan. The Metropolitan was known by the title of "the Gate of All India". The Indian Church was practically autonomous<sup>20</sup>. This was the situation until the Synod of Diamper in 1599.

#### a) The Metropolitan of All India

There are evidences of the existence of a Metropolitan dignitary among the Thomas Christians from the eighth century<sup>21</sup>. His official title was METROPOLITAN AND GATE OF ALL INDIA (metropolita o-thar'a d-kollah hendo)<sup>22</sup>. It was used also in short forms of "Gate of India," "Head of India" etc. "Gate" among the Orientals signifies "sublime authority". In the ninth century, according to the treatise of 'The Law of the Christians' of Ibn-Attib, the Metropolitan of India was elected by the people in the presence of the suffragan bishops. They were expected to get the Patriarch's approbation before referring the matter to the local king. According to the Vatican Syriac Codex XXII written in Cranganore, Kerala, in 1301, by a deacon called Zacharias, the Metropolitan of the time was "Mar Jacob, Bishop Metropolitan, Prelate and Ruler of the Holy See of the Apostle St. Thoms, namely our Ruler and (the Ruler) of the entire Holy Church of the Christians

19) Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Textus 167, pp. 119, 118, versio 168, pp. 121, 120.

20) Podipara P. J. *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, Alleppey, 1976, pp. 32-33,

21) Ibid. p. 31, Cfr. S. Giamil, op. cit. pp. 582-4.

22) Paulinus a S. Bartholomaeo, OCD, *India Orientalis Christiana*, Rome, 1794, p. 88.

of India”<sup>23</sup>. The title “*Holy See of the Apostle St. Thomas*” is quite significant. We have further testimony of the seventeenth century from a Jesuit priest Campori: “According to information gathered from several books and well-known facts, the bishop of the Serra (Malabar) was always an Archbishop, and is the oldest in India. Its Archbishops and Prelates were always called Archbishop Metropolitan of All-India and of its confines”<sup>24</sup>. Bishop Francis Roz SJ, the first Latin Bishop to govern the Thomas Christians, speaks about the extension of the word “Hendo”. Relying on the authority of an author who lived centuries before he says that Hendo, which signifies the same as India, “extends from the river Indus to Cape Comorin”<sup>25</sup>. In 1567 the Chaldean Patriarch Abdiso uses the title “Superior of all the bishops and metropolitans” for the Metropolitan Mar Abraham of the Thomas Christians<sup>26</sup>.

### b) Archdeacon

Etymologically, the term archdeacon means ‘chief minister’. For the first time this title is seen in the book *De Schismate Donatistarum* written about 366 by St. Optatus<sup>27</sup>. The title of archdeacon gradually began to be used for the chief assistant of the bishop in the administration of the diocese<sup>28</sup>. Among the Thomas Christians this office enjoyed a unique position, and its incumbent ‘The Archdeacon of All India’.

The historical sources are too scanty for an adequate picture of the development of this office in India. The earliest document in which it can be traced is a letter of the Chaldean Patriarch Timothy (780–826) addressed to the Archdeacon of India. The Patriarch addresses the Archdeacon as “*the Head of*

23) It is a Lectionary written in East Syriac.

24) Jesuit Archives, Rome, *Goa* 65, f. 4. The Portuguese called Malabar Serra.

25) *Ibid.* f. 43

26) Jesuit Archives, Rome, *Gall.* 95 I 197. The Decree is in original Chaldean.

27) *PL XI*, col. 916.

28) Kollaparampil J., *The Archdeacon of All-India*, Kot-tayam, 1972, p. 24.

*the Faithful in India*<sup>29</sup>. This letter speaks about the norms to be followed in the ordination of priests, bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs. W. Germann relates the origin of the archdiaconate to the time of Thomas of Cana<sup>30</sup>.

A palm-leaf document, written at Kothamangalam, says that in the year 1509 Archdeacon Ittikuriah effected a compromise between two parties allowing each a church with a 'palliyogam'. The Archdeacon is called the head of the community ("Jathikku Karthavvian")<sup>31</sup>. In this period, though there were five bishops in Malabar, the Archdeacon played the key role in the administration of the Church. From the reports of the Jesuits we get much information about the nature of the authority of the Archdeacon. Francis Dionysio S. J. writes to the Jesuit General, on Jan. 2, 1578: "There is, in this Christianity, a priest, a native of this country belonging to the Malabar caste, approved for his virtues and habits, and learned and experienced in ecclesiastical matters. He knows the S. Scripture and understands and speaks Chaldean. He is esteemed very much by these Christians, and before the gentile kings and lords he holds influence and recognition. He is the archdeacon of Angamaly and helps the archbishop, serving him as his provisor"<sup>32</sup>. "We went to visit the Archbishop and the Archdeacon of Angamaly who have the care of the Christianity of the Serra .... the Archbishop and the Archdeacon who holds great authority and credit in this Christianity" (we have this report in a letter of Manuel Texeira to the Jesuit General written on 10. 1. 1580)<sup>33</sup>. The Archdeacon was conscious of his position and responsibility. In a report of Fr. Valignani S. J. we have the following: "The Archdeacon then affirmed that the whole Christian community of Malabar rested on his shoulders both in spiritual and in temporal

29) Ibn-At-Tayib, *Fiqh an-Nasrania*, Das Recht der Christenheit, Part II, Louvain, 1957, p. 121.

30) Germann W., *Die Kirche der Thomas christen*, Gütersloh, 1877, p. 94; Cfr. J. Kollaparampil, op. cit. p. 80.

31) This MS document is in the possession of the Pothani-catt family, Kothamangalam.

32) Jesuit Archives Rome, Goa-Mal. Vol. 12, fol 1447 v-448.

33) Ibid. Goa-Mal. Vol. 13, fol. 13 v.

matters"<sup>34</sup>. The Archdeacon was responsible for the sustenance of the Archbishop and he used to fix the amount which each church should contribute. Funds were raised for the uplift of the poor. "After the religious ceremonies the Archbishop or the Archdeacon used to be seated in a chair and the faithful approached him with their donations. The collection was used to arrange marriages for the orphans, to redeem captives, to lend money to the poor without interest, to construct or repair churches etc"<sup>35</sup>. We get this information from a letter of Fr. Peter Luis to Mercurian on 23. 12. 1580<sup>36</sup>.

With the increase of their political power the Portuguese tried to latinize the Thomas Christians. In 1585 a Goan Council decided to introduce the Latin liturgy with Syriac translations among the Thomas Christians. We come across many papal briefs addressed to the Archdeacon. For the years 1576-1581 there are five papal briefs of Pope Gregory XIII addressed to the archdeacon regarding matters of ecclesiastical importance. The documents are dated Dec. 21, 1576<sup>37</sup>, Nov. 20, 1578<sup>38</sup> Jan. 3, 1579<sup>39</sup>, March 4, 1580<sup>40</sup> and Jan. 20, 1581<sup>41</sup>. These letters were sent to the Archdeacon while the Metropolitan Mar Abraham was here in Malabar. This reveals the unique position of the Archdeacon in the government of the Church. The latinizing policy of the Portuguese Jesuits was resisted by the Archdeacon. The Archdeacons defended the 'Law of Thomas', their legitimate ecclesial heritage, which included liturgy, discipline, spirituality and traditions. Mar Abraham died in February 1597. According to tradition the administration was in the hands of the Archdeacon. The Goan Archbishop wanted to make use of this opportunity to interfere in the affairs of the Thomas Chri-

34) Ibid. Goa-Mal. vol. 14, fol. 9.

35) Ibid. Goa-Mal. Vol. 13, fol. 39 v.

36) Kollaparampil J. op. cit. p. 90.

37) Jesuit Archives, Rome Goa-Mal. Vol. 31, fol. 407 v.

38) Beltrami Giuseppe, *La Chiesa Caldea nel secolo dell'unione*, Rome, 1933, p. 270.

39) Beltrami, ibid. p. 195.

40) Jesuit Archives, Rome, Goa-Mal. vol. 12, ff. 447-8.

41) Vatican Archives, Secr. Brev. Vol. 51, f. 57.

stians. He requested the Archdeacon to make a public profession of faith according to the Latin formula. The superior of the Dominicans of Cochin reports that the Archdeacon was quite learned and orthodox in his faith. But for the Portuguese Jesuits the Latin practices were the norms of orthodoxy! In a report of Dec. 24, 1597 sent by Fr. Roz S. J. to the Jesuits General it is stated that the Thomas Christians feared that the Jesuits were involved in a conspiracy to abolish their liturgy and traditions and to introduce the Latin ones<sup>2</sup>. The Archdeacons were trying to keep the individuality of the ancient Church of the Thomas Christians. The Archdeacon was their legitimate authority though there were also bishops sent from Chaldea. He was the unifying and coordinating factor of the Church.

A document of the 17th century recorded by the Italian Carmelite priest Giuseppe Sebastiani OCD, who was the Apostolic Commissary, points out the unique position of the Archdeacon among the Thomas Christians:

"La prima dignità dopo l'archiepiscopale nella Serra (Malabar) è quella di Archidiacono quale per antico privilegio e per successione in una medessima casa ha grandissima prerogazione all'uso della Chiesa Greca oltre che l'archidiacono è come principe e capo della Cristianità di S. Tomé per aver loro altra dignità sacra o profana della propria nazione".

(Archives of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide, Rome, Scritti riferiti nel Congr. General, Vol. 233, f. 111).

The Metropolitan was mainly concerned with the liturgical worship while the Archdeacon was responsible for the effective leadership of the Church as the *Jathikka Kathakaran*.

### III Palliyogam

In the ecclesial life of the Thomas Christians *palliyogam* played a very important role. A *yogam* consists of the representatives of the families and the clergy of a parish. This

assembly is presided over by the parish priest. The yogam discusses the problems connected with the life and activities of the parish, such as the approval of the candidates to priesthood, spiritual welfare of the parish, the financial administration, punishment for public sinners, reconciliation in times of conflict, etc. The candidates for priesthood have to get the *desakkuri*, the official approval, of the parish community.

The palliyogam is something unique among the Thomas Christians of India. This assembly seems to owe its origin to the ancient village assembly which was prevalent among the Dravidians. The Dravidians of the *Sanghakalam* (1-5 centuries AD)<sup>43</sup> used to gather together to discuss matters of common interest and take decisions on them. The leaders of the families were members of the *Mantam*. This assembly was an authoritative body at the village level. The families were obliged to abide by the decisions of this assembly. In the same way the palliyogam also consists of the leaders of the families. This yogam was responsible for the welfare of the local Christian community.

The members of the assembly enjoyed perfect equality and it was an effective means of maintaining communion and solidarity in the community. The idea of the Church as a community of fellowship was kept alive through the yogam. Fr. Boniface OCD gives a report of the nature and functioning of this Palliyogam among the Thomas Christians in 1750.

“In tutte le chiese Caldee li Cristiani trattano degl’affari ecclesiastici nelle aggiunte, le quali si compongono del clero e popolo tanto che non solo nelle spese da farsi a pio delle chiese, o sia per le ristorazioni, e fabbriche, ma anche *promuovere agl’Ordini sacri et assolvere dalle censure si fa del consiglio del clero e popolo*, et il vescovo non promuove i soggetti agli ordini, ne assolve dalle censure incorse senza che il postulante porti la supplica del popolo, il quale aggiunto in chiesa, udite le preghiere del supplicante *porge là detta supplica al Prelato*”.

43) For the Dravidian culture of the Sanghakalam see A. Sreedharanenon’s *The History of Kerala*, Kottayam, 1969 pp. 91-119.

"Nelle cose di maggior rilievo ammettono e convocano per tali aggiunte le popoli delle chiese convicine per consigliarsi con esse a quando l'affare è importantissimo, chiamano anche tutte le chiese di quel Regno, et alcune volte tutte la diocesi.... e questo tanto è giudicato importante per l'esecuzione, di modo che per non essere arrivati a tempo alcuni Cristiani alla sinodo di Diamper, fino a oggi di quantumque abbino accettato li decreti della detta sinodo in quanto spetta al Dogma, ma non l'anno perciò accettati per quello riguarda il mero costume, o per servirmi del termine sinodale. Disciplina e fino ad oggi non li osservano in molte cose".

(Archive of the S. Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Congregazioni Particolari, Vol. 109, f. 90.. Report of Fr. Boniface of Infant Jesus OCD, in 1750.)

The local problems of the community were discussed in the parish yogam. Matters of wider importance were discussed in the General Yogam which consisted of representatives of all the parishes. In the General Yogam the Archdeacon had a very decisive role. We come across such gatherings before important events of the Church. There were gatherings of this kind before and after the "Koonan Cross" oath. The general gathering decided to send Fr. Cariatti and others to Rome. The necessary money was raised by the General Yogam<sup>44</sup>. Fr. Paulinus of Bartholomeo, who was a Carmelite missionary in India, calls it a republican system of government. After studying the functioning of the ecclesial structure of the Thomas Christians he writes: "Tutti questi Cristiani compongono una specie di Republica Christiana civile, e quando e offesa una parrocchia.. le altre s'uniscono per defenderla. Il Parroco e gli anziani giudicono e decidono tutte le cose"<sup>45</sup>.

### The palliyogam among the Jacobite Thomas Christians

The palliyogam is preserved also by the non-Catholic Thomas Christians with some modifications. These Christians

44) Archives Prop. Fide, Rome, Congreg. Part. 30, f. 449; Cfr. Podipara P. J.. The Hierarchy. op. cit. 106.

45) Paulino da Bartholomeo, Viaggio alle Indie Orientali, Roma, 1796, pp. 136-39.

(Jacobites) separated, in 1653, from the jurisdiction of the Latin bishops in order to preserve their legitimate traditions. But they had to remain without a bishop of their own for some time. Finally in 1665 a Jacobite Bishop from Antioch reached Malabar and a group of Thomas Christians accepted him. This was the beginning of the Antiochian Jacobite tradition in India.

This community, which gradually began to be known as the Jacobites, preserved some of their ecclesial traditions though, on the whole, they gave up their own liturgy and adopted the West Syrian one. Because of this they are called *Puthenkuttukar* (the New party). Among them, also the palliyogam plays a very decisive role.

All young men who have reached the age of twenty-one are, *ipso facto*, eligible to be in the yogam. Every parish and diocese, and the Malankara Church as a whole, has yogams, on various levels. This parish yogam should be convened at least twice a year. Decisions are taken according to the majority opinion. There is a managing committee in every parish. A trustee (*kaikkāran*) is elected by the parish yogam. His term of office is one year. Diocesan yogams follow the same pattern at a higher level. Every parish is represented in the diocesan yogam by its parish priest and two elected laymen. The diocesan assembly has a managing committee consisting of four laymen and two priests. They are elected by the general diocesan yogam from all its members. The diocesan yogam and the managing committee look after temporal matters and others of ecclesial interest<sup>46</sup>. In keeping with the ancient traditions of the Thomas Christians there is a General Yogam of all the dioceses of the Malankara Church. It is called the Malankara Syrian Christian Association.

This Association consists of Bishops, priests and laymen. Every parish of the Malankara Church sends its parish priest and two elected laymen. It consists of 3000 members. The Malankara Metropolitan is the president and the bishops are the vice-presidents of this association. It has a managing committee

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46) For the structure of the palliyogam, and the Malanakara Association see Dr. A. P. Urumpackal's, *The Juridical Status of the Catholicos of Malabar*, Rome, 1977 pp. 102-106.

which consists of eight priests and sixteen laymen elected by the association from its members. The Malankara Association has a decisive role in the election and appointment of the bishops. But it needs the approval of the Episcopal Synod. The Catholicos is the President of the Episcopal Synod. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association is an evolved form of the palliyogam and the general yogam which existed among the Thomas Christians.

#### IV. Thomas Christians under the Latin Bishops

The sixteenth century was a golden age of western colonization. There was a close alliance between the Latin missionaries and the colonials. The Portuguese were pioneer settlers in India. They started a Latin diocese in Goa (1534) and another at Cochin (1558) in the hope of bringing the Thomas Christians under their jurisdiction. In a Goan Synod of 1585 it was decided to introduce the Latin liturgy and practices among the Thomas Christians. In the 'Synod of Diampe' of 1599 the Portuguese Archbishop, Dom Alexis Menezes of Goa, succeeded in appointing a Latin bishop to govern the Thomas Christians<sup>47</sup>. The Portuguese padroado was extended over them. An anomalous situation arose, in which the bishop and the rest of the clergy and people were of two different traditions!

From 1599 up to 1896 these Christians of Oriental rite were under the Latin Bishops who were appointed either by the Portuguese padroado or the Roman Congregation of Propaganda Fide. During these centuries of Latin rule the Catholic Thomas Christians were in a predicament. Their time-honoured traditions were neither understood nor appreciated by their Bishops who followed a different liturgy and discipline, liturgy and practices of the Latin Church. Legitimate resistance was branded heresy and schism! Such a policy resulted in a series of conflicts within the Church. The Thomas Christians under their indigenous leader, the Archdeacon, resisted this latinization. But the consequences were disastrous. The Thomas Christians who were of the same faith and communion up to 1653 became divided into Syro-Malabarians, Jacobites, Marthomites, Nestorians and other sects.

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47) For the details of this synod which is considered invalid see Jonas Thaliath's *The Synod of Diamper*, Rome, 1958.

All these divisions took place during the three centuries of Latin rule. The first division took place in 1653 with the Coonan Cross Oath. The representatives of the Thomas Christians, under the leadership of their Archdeacon Thomas, publicly took an oath that they would not obey the Portuguese bishops and the Jesuit fathers.<sup>48</sup>

## V. The present ecclesiological crisis of the Thomas Christians

From 1896 the Catholic Thomas Christians have been governed by bishops of their rite. It was hoped that the indigenous bishops would restore the identity of their Church which was disfigured during foreign domination. But, on the whole, their efforts have mainly been directed towards education. They have been following the Canon Law and customs of the Latin Church. There has been no transformation of their ecclesial identity. The reason is obvious. Though the bishops were Orientals the centres of clerical formation continued to be under the Latin missionaries. Oriental liturgy, Indian Church History, Oriental spirituality, traditions etc., were never adequately taught in these training centres. The result was that the bishops, priests and religious and through their influence the laity, continued to be ignorant of their past and out of their element in it. This strange situation continues even today wherever seminarians are trained in similar institutions. This remains a grave ecclesiological and ecumenical problem of Eastern Christianity in India. The direction given by Vatican II remains yet to be implemented here. Vatican II says:

“All should realize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the exceedingly rich liturgical and spiritual heritages of the Eastern Churches, in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition, and to bring about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians”.<sup>49</sup>

48) Cfr. Koodapuzha Xavier, (ed) *Church History*, Kottayam, 1974 ,pp. 599–635.

49) Vatican II, Ecumenism art. 15.

Similarly, the Decree on the Oriental Churches has not yet been properly executed in the Indian Context.<sup>50</sup> This conflict between the official teaching of the Church, and the inability of ecclesiastical leaders to implement it, is indeed a crisis. The root cause seems to be the inadequacy of the centres of clerical and religious formation, and the lack of theological enlightenment in the leadership.

The guide lines of Vatican II continue to be ignored in most of the Indian seminaries where Thomas Christians are undergoing clerical formation. In such seminaries theological formation is given without ecclesial experience of the Mother Church. The concept of the Catholic Church as a communion of individual churches has not yet become a reality in the Indian context.

### Conclusion

The Church needs her full heritage. She becomes impoverished if the individual Churches give up what is their own and simply imitate the practices of another individual Church. Servile imitation destroys one's own identity, and authenticity. The apostolic heritage is not the monopoly of a single individual Church. The communion of the various individual Churches of apostolic origin constitutes the Catholic heritage of the universal Church. It is in this ecclesiological perspective that the heritage of the Thomas Christians has to be understood and appreciated. The Church of the Thomas Christians of India, which is as old as Christianity itself, has to interpret her traditions in order to enrich the universal Church which is a communion of Churches.

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50) The art. 3 of the Decree on the Oriental Churches of Vat. II is formulated after special consideration of the inequality of opportunity of the Oriental Catholic missionaries in India.

Cfr. Herbert Vorgrimler (ed) *Documentis of Vat. II*, Vol. 1, London, 1967, p. 315; Victor J. Pospishil, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, The Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches of the II council of Vat., New York, 1965, pp. 13-14. Walter M. Abbott SJ, (ed) *The Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1966, p. 375, foot-note No. 7.

# The Post-Diamperitan Developments in the Church in India

## Introduction

The diocesan synod of Diamper celebrated at Udayamperor (Diamper) in June 1599 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Indian Church. It enacted fundamental changes in the rite and ecclesiastical laws of the Thomas Christians of Malabar. The several-centuries-old authority of the Eastern Patriarch over them was eliminated for ever, and the royal patronage of Portugal (Padroado) was extended over their see. Latin bishops were appointed for them. The latinizing policy of the Padroado bishops met with great opposition. It culminated in an open revolt known in history as the Coonan Cross Oath. This revolt caused great confusion in Malabar. Rome intervened and many *came under* the legitimate authority, but they were reluctant to obey the Padroado bishops. Rome, therefore, erected the Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar without suppressing the Padroado jurisdiction so that the Christians might not be left without a bishop. Thus the Thomas Christians were divided into two jurisdictions, i. e. the Padroado and the Propaganda. This double jurisdiction ended in the erection of the Latin Hierarchy and Syro-Malabar Vicariates in 1886 and 1887 respectively. A small group remained under Archdeacon Thomas who was declared archbishop by the imposition of hands by twelve priests. Later this group formed an independent Church and cherished a communion with the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. They made several attempts at reunion with the Catholic Church and were ultimately successful. As a result a few were reunited with the Catholic Church. The present article evaluates these post-diamperitan developments in the Church in India.

## I

## The Malabar Church under the Padroado (1599-1659)

From 1599 to 1659 the Malabar Church was under Portuguese Latin jurisdiction. Three archbishops, all Jesuits, governed them. During this period the rights and privileges of the Arch-deacon were curtailed. There was strong reaction against this. It burst out in 1653, and the Church was divided. Attempts have been made to re-unite all by Rome as well as by the native clergy.

### **1. The three Latin archbishops**

#### *i) Archbishop Francis Roz S. J. (1599-1624)*

On November 5, 1599, the Holy See appointed Francis Roz as Archbishop of Angamale. On December 20 of the same year Pope Clement VIII reduced the ancient see of Angamale to a bishopric and made it a suffragan of the Portuguese Latin Arch-bishopric of Goa which was founded in 1534. On August 4, 1600, the right of Portuguese patronage was extended to it<sup>1</sup>. Thus the Apostolic Church of Malabar which had enjoyed a kind of autonomy, together with several privileges, was made subject to a Latin Church. It is to be noted that the Chaldean Patriarch, to whom the Malabar Church had been subject was in communion with Rome<sup>2</sup>.

There was strong reaction in Malabar against the reduction of the ancient metropolitan see to the status of a simple diocese. Petitions requesting the restoration of the suppressed title were sent to the Holy See from Malabar<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, on December 22, 1608, Pope Paul V (1605-1627) restored the metropolitan title of Angamale<sup>4</sup>. On December 3, 1609, the title and residence of Angamale were transferred to Cranganore<sup>5</sup>.

1) Beltrami G., *La Chiesa nel secolo dell'unione*, Roma, pp. 133-134, n. 104, 105.

2) Ibid., pp. 80-81.

3) Ibid., pp. 263-267; ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, 15, ff. 30-31.

4) Beltrami, *op. cit.*, p. 135, n. 108.

5) Ibid., p. 137, n. 113.

In the beginning Archbishop Roz and Archdeacon Thomas worked together in harmony and peace. But their relations gradually deteriorated. The main reasons for this were the centralization of all authority by the Archbishop, which reduced the power of the Archdeacon, almost to nothing the excommunication of the Archdeacon in connection with the arrival of an Armenian whom the Archdeacon honoured as a bishop sent by the Chaldean Patriarch and the appointment of a new archdeacon. Though the Archbishop absolved the Archdeacon from excommunication<sup>6</sup>, the disagreement continued, and reached its climax in 1618 when Roz, on going to Goa, left the administration of the see to the rector of the Jesuit college at Cranganor<sup>7</sup>.

Roz died on 16 February 1624 without being reconciled with the Archdeacon. After his death, the Archdeacon took charge of the see.

#### ii) *Stephen Britto S. J. (1624–1641)*

Stephen Britto, a friend of Archdeacon George, was consecrated archbishop on 24 September 1624 and took possession of the see towards the end of November of the same year<sup>8</sup>. In 1626 Britto and George together founded a new religious order, the Congregation of St. Thomas<sup>9</sup>. The Jesuits requested the Holy See not to approve the said Congregation because they feared that they would be ousted from Malabar, if a new Congregation grew with papal approbation<sup>10</sup>.

The disagreement between Britto and the Archdeacon began in 1627 with the arrival of the Dominicans, who started a school at Kaduthuruthy with the consent of the Archdeacon<sup>11</sup>. The reason was that the Jesuits disliked the idea of missionaries of other religious orders working in Malabar<sup>12</sup>. Their disagreement became

6) ARSI., Goa-Mal., 50, f. 216; Ibid., Goa-Mal., 17, f. 148.

7) Ibid., Goa-Mal., 17, f. 235.

8) APF., SOCG. 189, ff. 334–339.

9) APF., SOCG, 138, ff. 220–223.

10) ARSI, 18, f. 92.

11) APF., SOCG, 138, ff. 220–223.

12) APF., SOCG, 194, ff. 162–163.

explicit in 1632 when Britto refused to hear the grievances of the Christians<sup>13</sup>. The archdeacon and the priests protested and decided not to admit the Jesuits into their churches, not to send candidates to the Jesuit seminary, and not to accept letters patent of appointments, suspension, etc. unless they were signed by the Archdeacon. They also demanded that Britto's successor must be a non-Jesuit knowing Syriac<sup>14</sup>. When things moved in this way Britto agreed to make peace with the Archdeacon. But the attempt failed because there was a move on the part of Viceroy to kill the Archdeacon<sup>15</sup>. This again widened the breach.

In 1635 the Jesuit Provincial effected the reconciliation between Britto and the Archdeacon and for the rest of their time together they were at peace<sup>16</sup>. Archdeacon George died on July 25, 1640, and was buried at Angamale<sup>17</sup>. Britto promoted Thomas, a nephew of the late Archdeacon, to the archdiaconal dignity. Britto died on December 3, 1641<sup>18</sup>.

Archdeacon George of the Cross governed the Malabar Church for fortyseven years. It was a critical period. When he assumed the dignity of the archdeacon the Malabar Church was under the Chaldean Patriarch. Under the Latin bishops he lost several of his rights and privileges. This caused dissension between him and the bishops. While the Jesuits labelled him a heretic and a schismatic, the other Religious Orders defended his activities. Even his critics admired his intellectual and administrative capacities. Nobody dared to question his moral integrity. George wanted to keep the rite and the individuality and freedom of his Church. He also wanted to defend the rights and privileges which he and his predecessors had enjoyed under the Chaldean Metropolitans. But he died without reaching this goal.

13) Kollaparampil J., The Archdeacon of All-India, Rome, 1972, p. 128.

14) Ibid.

15) Ibid.

16) ARSI, Goa 18, ff. 147-148.

17) Kollaparampil, op. cit., p. 132.

18) ARSI, Goa, 56, ff. 491-498.

iii) *Francis Garcia S. J. (1641–1659)*

Francis Garcia, who had been nominated coadjutor and successor to Britto on June 23, 1636<sup>19</sup>, succeeded him on December 3, 1641<sup>20</sup>. He was determined to govern his archdiocese personally, forgetting that he was called upon to govern a Church which had centuries-old traditions of its own based on the Canon Law of the Chaldean Church. Thomas, on the other hand, was equally determined to maintain the traditional status of the archdeacon in the Church of the Thomas Christians. While Garcia was harsh, vindictive and pertinacious, Thomas was scrupulous and resolute<sup>21</sup>.

The diametrically opposed characters of Garcia and Thomas made it inevitable that they should clash. Garcia showed no inclination whatever to share his powers with the Archdeacon<sup>22</sup>. Thomas reacted against it by various means<sup>23</sup>. In 1644 the Archdeacon convened a meeting of priests at Edappally to present a joint demand to Garcia that the latter should respect the traditional status and powers of his office. The meeting ended without results because of poor attendance. Thomas, therefore, sought peace with the Archbishop<sup>24</sup>.

The dissension between Garcia and Thomas went so far that it developed into reciprocal recrimination. In 1645, when the Viceroy of Portuguese India arrived in Malabar, Thomas prepared a long list of complaints against Garcia to present to him. Garcia and his companions, on the other hand, made two elaborate judicial enquiries regarding the rebellious conduct of the Archdeacon and his allies<sup>25</sup>. On December 12, 1645, on the initiative of the Viceroy, Garcia and Thomas came to a compromise from which, in reality, nothing substantial was granted to the Archdeacon<sup>26</sup>.

19) ARSI, Goa, 68 II, ff. 649–650.

20) ARSI, Goa, 49, f. 196.

21) Thekkedathu J., *The Troubled Days of Francis Garcia S. J., Archbishop of Cranganore (1641–1659)*, Rome, 1972, p. 23.

22) ARSI, Goa, 50, f. 218.

23) Thekkedathu, op. cit. p. 24–25.

24) Ibid., p. 25; ARSI, Goa, 68 I, ff. 6, 23.

25) Thekkedathu, op. cit., pp. 26–31.

26) Ibid., p. 31.

Again Thomas tried to come to good terms with Garcia<sup>27</sup>. But Garcia did not want to part with his jurisdiction over Thomas. When his attempts failed, Thomas turned to the Dominicans and the Carmelites. He authorized the Carmelites to deal with the Holy See as his procurators<sup>28</sup>. Since his adversaries were more powerful in Rome, Thomas did not get any reply to his petitions. Therefore, during the years 1648 and 1649, he began correspondence with the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon<sup>29</sup>.

Mutual recrimination widened the breach. Everybody feared the worst in Malabar if the quarrel between the Archbishop and the Archdeacon was not settled in time.

## 2. Coonan Cross Oath – 1653

On August 25, 1652, there came, to Mylapore, an Oriental bishop called Atallah<sup>30</sup>. He was said to have been sent to govern the Thomas Christians in response to the Archdeacon's letter to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria<sup>31</sup>. Some pilgrims from Malabar to Mylapore met Atallah and when they returned they carried with them a letter from Atallah, addressed to the Thomas Christians, requesting them to send two priests and forty laymen to release him from restraint and conduct him to Malabar<sup>32</sup>.

The Archdeacon gave wide publicity to the news about Atallah. At a general meeting it was decided to request Garcia to take Atallah to Malabar. The Archbishop, however, was informed that Atallah be received only if he was sent by the Pope. In any case Garcia would not allow Atallah to enter Malabar<sup>33</sup>.

27) ARSI, Goa 68 I, ff. 28-29.

28) APF, SOCG, 191, f. 559.

28) APF, SOCG, 191, f. 658.

30) ARSI; Goa, 68 I, ff. 77-78; For detailed study on Attallah cf. Thekkedathu, op. cit., pp. 73-82.

31) APF, SOCG, 191, f. 658.

32) APF, SOCG, 232, f. 2.

33) APF, SOCG, 234, f. 338.

The Thomas Christians, therefore, decided that as many as possible would assemble at Mattancherry to meet Atallah in Cochin on his way to Goa<sup>34</sup>.

The Arahdeacon and his followers tried, in vain, through various ecclesiastical and civil authorities to get permission to meet Atallah and to examine his credentials<sup>35</sup>. Once again they called on Garcia for a reconciliation. When it failed they entered the Church of Our Lady at Mattancherry and in front of a crucifix with lighted candles they solemnly swore, on the Holy Gospel, that they would no longer obey Garcia and the Jesuits<sup>36</sup>. This ceremony took place on Friday, January 3, 1653. It is known as the Coonan Cross Oath because according to a tradition in Malabar, a rope was tied to the open-air cross in front of the Church and all touched that rope when they made the oath.

Actually the Coonan Cross Oath was not against the authority of the Pope. This is clear from a manifesto which was published in public places, stating that the Thomas Christians concerned rejected Garcia and the Jesuits because they had disobeyed the Pope and had sent back the Patriarch appointed by him<sup>37</sup>.

The events that followed the Coonan Cross Oath made things worse. On February 5, 1653, at Edappally a forged letter was read out granting the Archdeacon all the powers of the Archbishop, and the people acclaimed him as their archbishop<sup>38</sup>. On May 22, of the same year, at Alangatt, Thomas was declared archbishop by the imposition of hands by twelve priests with the authority of the forged letter. Letters were sent to all the churches asking them to recognize Thomas as their legitimate pastor<sup>39</sup>.

The Coonan Cross Oath and the subsequent events were not the outcome of a sudden emotion. They had definite causes. They can be easily traced back at least to the Synod of Diamper.

34) APF, SOCG, 232, f. 116.

35) APF, SOCG, 234, f. 337.

36) APF, SOCG, 232, ff. 120-121.

37) ARSI, Goa, 68 I, f. 102.

38) APF, SOCG, 232, f. 121.

39) APF, SOCG, 234, f. 338; Thekkedathu, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

### 3. The Attempts to win back the rebels

#### A. Garcia and the Jesuits

Garcia and the Jesuits tried in vain to bring back the rebels by force with the help of the Portuguese authorities of Cochin. Garcia also tried to win over the local kings with bribes<sup>40</sup>.

#### B. The Goan Inquisition

At the request of Garcia the Goan Inquisition first sent to Malabar Fr. John Rangal whom the Archdeacon and his followers refused to accept because they suspected him of being partial to Garcia and the Jesuits. The Inquisition, then, sent Fr. John de Lisboa O. P., with instructions that he should avoid contacts with Garcia and the Jesuits, lest he should be suspected of partiality. Since Garcia was obstinate and proceeded, with disciplinary measures against Thomas and his followers, Lisboa's mission failed.

#### C. The Intervention of Rome

It was only in 1655 that Rome came to know of the deplorable events that had taken place in Malabar. Rome had the reports personally from Fr. De Magistris S. J. and from the letters sent from Malabar through the Carmelites<sup>42</sup>. After much reflection, on November 22, 1655, the Propaganda decided to entrust the Carmelites with the task of pacification and to send a papal commissary with ample faculties to treat with the Archdeacon and his followers, to absolve them and to receive them back into the Church<sup>43</sup>. In order to settle the problem quickly, and fearing that Portugal would delay the voyage of the commissary, the Pope decided to send two Apostolic Commissaries by two different routes to Malabar. Accordingly the two Apostolic Commissaries, Fr. Hyacinth of St. Vincent, accompanied by Fr. Marcel of St. Ives, and Fr. Joseph of St. Mary (Sebastiani) accompanied by Frs. Vincent of St. Catherine and Raphael of St. Alexis,

40) Thekkedathu, op. cit., pp. 83-92.

41) Ibid., pp. 92-100.

42) APF, Acta, 24, f. 52.

43) Ibid., f. 24, 80-81.

left Rome in February 1656<sup>44</sup>. The first group proceeded to Malabar via Lisbon and the second via Syria and Iraq.

Sebastiani reached Malabar in February 1657<sup>45</sup>. He, then, informed Thomas of his arrival and its purpose. Only after seven days could he meet Thomas and the meeting produced no result<sup>46</sup>. After this meeting Thomas sent to all the churches a letter discrediting the Commissary and his companions<sup>47</sup>.

As the days passed, many abandoned Thomas and promised obedience to the Apostolic Commissary. Then, through the constant efforts of Sebastiani, Thomas convened a general assembly of priests and the people on May 19, 1657. At this meeting Thomas requested the Commissary to consecrate him bishop. Thus it became known to all that episcopal consecration of Thomas on May 22, 1653, at Alangatt, was invalid<sup>48</sup>.

Meetings were arranged also at Muttom, Mattancherry and Alangatt by the Carmelites to win back the Archdeacon and his followers. The object was also to declare that Thomas was not bishop and hence, those ordained by him were not priests; and that Sebastiani was the Apostolic Commissary sent by the Pope.<sup>49</sup>

While Sebastiani was continuing his mission in Malabar, he heard of the arrival of Hyacinth of St. Vincent in Goa. Sebastiani, therefore, left Malabar for Rome on 7 January 1658 to report to the Pope regarding the situation in Malabar. He reached Rome on February 22, 1659<sup>50</sup>. In the meantime, on March 10, 1658, Fr. Hyacinth reached Cochin.

44) Sebastiani, G., *Prima Spedizione all'Indie Orientali del P. F. Giuseppe di Santa Maria,.... Roma, 1666*, pp. 9-10.

45) Ibid., pp. 88-89.

46) Ibid., pp. 92-93.

47) Ibid. p. 97.

48) APF, SOCG, 233, ff. 255-256.

49) Sebastiani, op. cit., pp. 125-127.

50) APF SOCG, 232, f. 261.

Since there was a misunderstanding that Hyacinth was the tool of Garcia and the Jesuits, his efforts were not successful from the beginning. Hyacinth convoked meetings in different places with view to winning back Thomas and his followers. But they produced no result because Thomas stood firm on his demand that he should be recognized as bishop<sup>51</sup>. The solemn entry of the new archdeacon appointed by Garcia in Kaduthuruthy also spoiled the negotiations between Hyacinth and Thomas. Hyacinth suspected that Garcia and the Jesuits had sent the new archdeacon to Kaduthuruthy<sup>52</sup>.

Garcia died on September 3, 1659. After his death there was some progress in the work of the Commissary. But Hyacinth could not continue his mission owing to ill-health. He died at Cochin on February 10, 1661 and was buried there<sup>53</sup>.

## II

### **The Malabar Church under the Propaganda jurisdiction**

After submitting his report to the Holy See, Sebastiani reached Cochin on May 14, 1661. He had been secretly consecrated bishop in Rome on December 15, 1659. He was also appointed the administrator of the whole of Malabar and was given the power to hand over the administration of the Archdiocese to one or two native priests whom he would appoint as Vicars Apostolic, after episcopal consecration<sup>54</sup>. This appointment was a provision for the spiritual needs of these Christians who were unwilling to remain under the Padroado.

By 1663 the Portuguese monopoly over Malabar was in full decline. On January 7, 1663 the Dutch captured Cochin. They ordered all the priests and the religious to leave Cochin immediately<sup>55</sup>. Sebastiani was not an exception. He, therefore, before leaving Malabar, decided to confer episcopal consecration on

51) APF SOCG, 233, ff. 234-235.

52) APF SOCG, 232, f. 371.

53) APF SOCG, 233, ff. 69, 237.

54) APF SOCG, 232, f. 420; ASV, Secr. Brev. 1362, f. 197.

55) APF SOCG, 233, ff. 415-416.

one of the faithful native priests in virtue of the provisions of the papal Brief "Pro Commissa Nobis"<sup>56</sup>. Accordingly on February 1, 1663, at Kaduthuruthy, Sebastiani consecrated Alexander Parampil titular bishop of Megara and Vicar apostolic of Malabar, in the presence of a large assembly of the Thomas Christians<sup>57</sup>. He, then, publicly excommunicated Archdeacon Thomas<sup>58</sup>.

The election of Alexander as bishop was a silver lining for the Malabar Church. In the first years of his episcopate there was relative peace. He governed the Church with the help of the Carmelites and the favour of the Dutch. He succeeded to a certain extent in uniting the majority of the Thomas Christians under him; but his episcopate was not smooth, because Thomas was on the look-out for means to expel him from Malabar. Eastern prelates crept into Malabar with new doctrines and under the pretence of restoring the ancient traditions of the Malabar Church. The Carmelites, for their part, were trying to send European bishops to Malabar. They feared to entrust the Malabar Church to an indigenous bishop<sup>59</sup>.

The local kings demanded money for their service! If Alexander Parampil failed to give it, it was possible that one parish or more passed into the Archdeacon's jurisdiction<sup>60</sup>. It was this miserable condition that compelled him to ask for a European bishop and for the protection of a foreign king who, he hoped, would help him financially<sup>61</sup>. Perhaps Bishop Alexander was not conscious of its evil consequences, i. e. the liabilities and the sacrifice that would result from it. In those days, as also later, the Malabar Church depended too much on foreign resources, ecclesiastical and civil. This dependence hindered this Church from growing organically with its own individuality. Old age impeded Alexander from looking after the spiritual needs of

56) ASV, Secr. Brev. 1362, f. 283.

57) APF SOCG, 234, f. 382 v.

58) Ibid., f. 368.

59) APF SOCG, 234, f. 407; 233 f. 203.

60) APF SOCG, 429, ff. 186-187.

61) APF SOCG 429, f. 188.

all his subjects. His ignorance of Latin and Portuguese made it difficult for him to have regular correspondence with Rome and Portugal.

It was to remedy these handicaps that Bishop Alexander requested the Propaganda to appoint a coadjutor with the right of succession<sup>62</sup>. The Propaganda acceded to this, and on January 29, 1675, it decided to elect the Archdeacon of Malabar as coadjutor to Bishop Alexander<sup>63</sup>. On March 30 of the same year Pope Clement X (1670–1676) deputed four Carmelites for the purpose. By the Apostolic Brief dated the same day they were ordered to appoint the Archdeacon bishop or, if he was absent or unwilling, to appoint George, the Vicar of Muttom, any other Malabar priest more suitable, reliable, prudent and zealous. The Brief insisted that the coadjutor should be an Indian<sup>64</sup>. Before their departure from Italy, on August 30, the Propaganda prepared three separate Briefs at Sebastian's suggestion, in favour of each of the three alternative candidates<sup>65</sup>. This was in order to avoid any misunderstanding and surprise to the people during the execution of the original Brief in which different persons were mentioned! After the election only the corresponding Brief with the name of the appointed person, conferring the faculty on him was to be read in public<sup>66</sup>.

The deputed Carmelites reached Malabar in April, 1676<sup>67</sup>. On March 3, 1677, they elected Raphael Figueiredo de Salgado, a priest of Portuguese origin<sup>68</sup>. They had precise directives from Rome to elect a priest of the community as bishop, but they preferred a non-Malabarian. Their report about this election brought to light the fact that they wanted, at any cost, to prevent a Malabar Syrian from becoming bishop. The utmost care with which the three separate Briefs for the election were asked for, the instructions of bishop Sebastiani to the electors

62) APF SOCG 427, ff. 118–121.

63) APF, Acta 45, f. 191 v; SOCG 453, f. 197 r.

64) Asv, Secr. Brev, 1551, f. 47.

65) ASV, Secr. Brev. 1561, f. 49; SOCG 473, f. 401.

66) APF SOCG, 453, f. 202.

67) AGOCD, 265a, f. 9.

68) APF SOCG 473, f. 390.

to publish the Brief of appointment after the election, and the proceedings of the electors in Malabar, all pointed to this object. In this matter, and in others too, the Propaganda depended too much on Sebastiani's decision. It was a mistake on the part of the Propaganda because it should have listened to the Church of Malabar, not to one who had scanty knowledge of that Church. Bishop Sebastiani's four years' stay among the discontented Christians of Malabar was insufficient to enable him to pass judgment on a Church with an apostolic tradition. On May 8 1677 Thomas de Castro, Vicar Apostolic of Canara, under threats of penalties, consecrated Raphael<sup>69</sup>. After a year's stay in Goa, Raphael entered the church of Palai on September 17, 1678<sup>70</sup>.

Bishop Alexander proposed that his nephew Mathew de Campo should succeed him. No doubt Mathew was a man of fine character. Mathew of St. Joseph who had more experience of Malabar than Sebastiani, spoke of him as moderate, humble, prudent, zealous, well-versed in languages, loved by all, and the right hand of Bishop Alexander<sup>71</sup>. The fact that Mathew de Campo was appointed Administrator of the Archdiocese of Cranganore in 1694, was a recognition of his qualities as bishop. One objection to Mathew was that he belonged to the family de Campo, and the Carmelites wanted to stop the hereditary succession. It is true that in the Malabar Church the office of the archdeacon was hereditary, but it was not considered an abuse and nobody complained about it. Bishop Alexander may have desired to have this custom followed in the election of his successor.

The friendly relationship of the Carmelites with Raphael did not last long. They repented of his election and admitted their mistake, but it was too late. They sent reports about the scandalous life of Raphael and his inability to govern the Church. They stated that he was not even worthy of being a sacristan<sup>72</sup>. They joined Alexander and his followers and accused

69) APF SOCG 473, ff. 363-364.

70) SOCG 428, ff. 54, 60.

71) SOCG 423, f. 468.

72) SOCG 496, ff. 394-398.

Raphael of creating trouble in Malabar. The Carmelites, then, refrained from proceeding against Archdeacon Mathew<sup>73</sup> on a special Brief which they had obtained from Rome. They had wanted to depose Mathew in order to be revenged on the family de Campo because of its opposition to the election of Raphael. The Carmelites now acknowledge the importance of the office of the Archdeacon in the Malabar Church. They came to understand that the Thomas Christians were even ready to risk their lives to preserve their customs and traditions.<sup>74</sup>

On January 2 1687, Bishop Alexander died<sup>75</sup>. The Thomas Christians hoped in vain to be governed thereafter by their own bishops. If the Carmelites had elected an indigenous bishop instead of Raphael, the history of the Malabar Church would have been different. Their word carried weight with Rome.

The Propaganda appointed Bishop Custodius Pinho, the Vicar Apostolic of Great Moghul, to make an enquiry into Raphael's conduct<sup>76</sup>. On the basis of his report Raphael was suspended in 1694 and Custodius was appointed in his stead<sup>77</sup>. Custodius did not come to Malabar and Raphael died on October 12, 1695 before the order of his suspension reached him<sup>78</sup>.

### III

## A double Jurisdiction in the Malabar Church

By double jurisdiction we mean the Propaganda and Padroado jurisdictions. In the second half of 17th century there were no Padroado bishops in Malabar. But the picture at the beginning of the 18th century, was quite different. There were Propaganda and Padroado bishops in Malabar. Though the insti-

73) Mathew was appointed Archdeacon sometime in the beginning of 1678. cf. Pallipurathukunnel T., A Double Regime in the Malabar Church (1663-1716), (Dissertation, unpublished), Rome, 1975, p. 50; APF SC (IOC) vol. 2, ff. 505-506.

74) SOCG 496, ff. 115-116.

75) APF CP 30, f. 408.

76) SOCG 499, f. 342 r; CP 30, ff. 768-779.

77) CP. 30, f. 807; ASV Secr. Brev. 1883, f. 25,

78) AGOCD, 265 a, f. 142.

tution of the Vicariate Apostolic was provisional, the Holy See was constrained to maintain it. Finally the Vicariate Apostolic was converted into a part of the Latin hierarchy; the Padroado see was suppressed, but the status of the ancient Church of the Thomas Christians was recognized only in 1923 with the erection of the Syro-Malabar hierarchy.

On April 1, 1698, the Carmelites obtained permission from the Dutch for a bishop and a few missionaries to work in Malabar<sup>79</sup>. On February 20, 1700, Pope Innocent XII appointed Angelus Francis of St. Therese Vicar Apostolic of Malabar until the Archbishop of Cranganore and the Bishop of Cochin personally occupied their respective dioceses<sup>80</sup>. Here the appointment was provisional. As it was considered a violation of the right of the King of Portugal, no Portuguese bishop wanted to consecrate Angelus<sup>81</sup>. On this occasion the Carmelites made use of the presence of an East Syrian bishop. Simon of Ada<sup>82</sup>, who consecrated Angelus on May 22, 1701, at Alangatt<sup>82a</sup>. The Jesuits censured the consecration because they suspected Simon of Ada of Nestorianism<sup>83</sup>. The Propaganda declared that the consecration was valid and licit and that Simon was in communion with Rome<sup>84</sup>. After the consecration the Carmelites sent Simon to Pondicherry where he died in an accident on August 16, 1720, and was buried<sup>85</sup>.

Simon's immediate departure for Pondicherry caused suspicion about the Carmelites. Probably they feared that the Christians of Malabar would accept Simon as their archbishop. They are accused of bribing the Dutch Commander to force

79) APF CP 30, ff. 822, 829; SC (IOC) 39, f. 516.

80) CP 30, f. 809; CP 109, f. 23; ASV Secr. Bkev. 2024, f. 21, 23, 27.

81) ARSI Goa 19, ff. 259-268; AGOCD 265 a, ff. 144, 148; Acta 73, f. 107.

82) For detailed study on Simon cf. Pallipurathukunnel, op. cit. pp. 121-137.

82a) AGOCD 265 a. f. 148; SoCG. 545, f. 57

83) ARSI Goa, 52, ff. 21-25.

84) ARSI Goa, 52, ff. 70-71.

85) Nagam Aiya, The Travencore State Manual II, Trivandrum, 1906, pp. 190-191.

Simon to consecrate Angelus. It is reported that they kept Simon in a secluded part of the church under the pretext that he was taking rest after his long journey. It is recorded that while he was asleep they sent him by boat to the governor of Pondicherry, asking him to put Simon in chains for life<sup>86</sup>. In *Angamale padiola*, written in 1787, it is stated that at midnight, without others knowing it, Simon was taken to Pondicherry and was killed while locked in a room<sup>87</sup>. This corresponds to another statement that Simon died in a prison at Ariacupam<sup>88</sup>.

On December 5, 1701, accepting the King of Portugal's nominee, Pope Clement XI appointed John Ribeiro S. J. the Archbishop of Cranganor<sup>89</sup>. Then, on June 29, 1704, when the Vicar Apostolic retired, Ribeiro took over the See of Cranganor<sup>90</sup>. He could not, however, have free access to his archdiocese owing to the reluctance of the Thomas Christians to accept a Jesuit bishop and the opposition of the Dutch and the local kings to a Portuguese. He, therefore, had to retire to the territory of the zamorin of Calicut, outside the Dutch conquests. Ribeiro blamed the Carmelites for this<sup>91</sup>. But the Carmelites reported that the arrival of Archbishop Ribeiro had caused confusion in Malabar<sup>92</sup>. The majority of the Thomas Christians did not want him as their archbishop. They adhered to the oath of their ancestors in 1653. In 1709 they sent a petition to Rome for a Carmelite bishop<sup>93</sup>.

Seeing the difficulties of Archbishop Ribeiro in taking possession of his see, Pope Clement XI, on March 13, 1709, extended the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic Angelus over areas where the respective bishops of Cranganor and Cochin were

86) *Notícias do Reino do Malabar*, Bibl. Nacional, Fondo Geral, 536, ff. 16-17.

87) Paremmakkal T., *Varthamanapusthakam* (tr. into English by Placid J. Podipara) OCA, Roma, 1971, pp. 249-250.

88) *Notícias* op. cit. ff. 16-18.

89) ASV, Seer. Brev. 2086, f. 41.

90) AGOCD 265 a, f. 199.

91) APF SOCG, 562, ff. 752-794.

92) SOCG 574, ff. 92, 99; SOCG 581, ff. 269-270; SOCG 562, f. 711.

93) SOCG 587, ff. 126-127.

impeded from exercising their jurisdiction<sup>94</sup>. Angelus received the papal Brief only on December 22, 1711<sup>95</sup>. He then, began the second round of his administration. But he could not minister to the Malabar Church for long. He died on October 17, 1712<sup>96</sup>. Even after the death of Angelus, Archbishop Ribeiro could not have free access in his archdiocese; he had no permanent abode. He died on January 24, 1716 and was buried at Puthenchira<sup>97</sup>.

By the extension of the jurisdiction of the vicar apostolic in 1709, a clear distinction was made between the Padroado and the Propaganda jurisdictions. The residence of the Padroado prelates of Cranganor was at Puthenchira, while that of the Propaganda vicars apostolic was at Verapoly. This double jurisdiction continued until the erection of the Latin hierarchy in 1886 and the Syro-Malabar Vicariates in 1887. The title "Metropolitan of All India" of the prelates of the Thomas Christians was no longer valid? and his jurisdiction over the whole India was, thus, after several changes, reduced to almost a third of Malabar. The Vicariate Apostolic of Malabar (Verapoly) became a Latin archdiocese and the Padroado archdiocese of Cranganor was suppressed and its title given *ad honorem*, to the Portuguese Padroado Bishop of Damuan. When Damuan was suppressed this title was given to the Portuguese Padroado Archbishop of Goa<sup>98</sup>

The two Vicariates Apostolic of Trichur and Kottayam, which were erected for the Thomas Christians in 1887, were reorganized into three: Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry. In 1911 the Vicariate Apostolic of Kottayam was erected for the southists. in 1923 the Syro-Malabar hierarchy with Ernakulam as Metropolis and Trichur, Changanacherry and Kottayam as suffragans, was partly erected.

94) ASV, Secr. Brev., 2251, ff. 29-30.

95) SOCG 591, ff. 219-220; SOCG 593, ff. 39-40; AGOCD 265 a, f. 218.

96) AGOCD 266 g bis, f. 702.

97) SOCG 625, f. 663r; AGOCD 265a, f. 246 r; AGOCD 266 h, f. 5.

98) Podipara P. J., The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church, Alleppey, 1976, p. 173.

## IV

**The Repercussions of the Coonan Cross Oath**

The revolt in 1653 was not intended to be a separation from the Roman Church. It was only a protest against the Jesuits. unfortunately it ended in division. The further developments among the separated, after the Coonan Cross Oath, are now considered.

Archdeacon Thomas, who was declared archbishop Thomas I in 1653, governed his followers till his death on April 23, 1673<sup>99</sup>. During his reign, in 1665, a certain Gregory under the title of Archbishop (Patriarch?) of Jerusalem arrived in Malabar and Jacobite doctrines began to infiltrate among the followers of Thomas<sup>100</sup>.

Thomas and his followers did not accept Gregory's doctrines whole-heartedly. The deviations they noticed made them suspect that he was not sent by the Pope. Therefore Gregory could not openly propagate his doctrines. He understood that the people were discontented with the Latin rule and were eager to have ancient customs and traditions, which had been Latinized, restored. He, therefore, persuaded them to revive and maintain them. It was the conviction that Gregory would free them from Latin rule that persuaded the people to accept him in spite of his doctrinal aberrations. Gregory died on April 24, 1641, and was buried in the church of North Parur<sup>101</sup>.

Thomas I could not receive valid consecration from Gregory<sup>102</sup>. He died on April 22, 1673,<sup>103</sup> and was succeeded by his nephew

99) AGOCD 265 a, f. 6.

100) SOCG 429, f. 189;

101) SC (IOC) 1, ff. 530-533; AGOCD 265 a, f. 6.

102) Some Say that Gregory consecrated Thomas. cf. Rae G. M., The Syrian Church in India, London, 1892, p. 269. But we do not have sufficient proof for this from contemporary documents.

103) APF SC (IOC) vol. 3, ff. 143-144.

as Thomas II (a brother of Thomas I) was declared bishop but survived only eight days). During this time, in 1678, there came a certain Andrew who called himself patriarch. But he was an ordinary Jacobite priest from Aleppo with a bad reputation<sup>104</sup>. He created trouble among the followers of Thomas and the Catholics. He was addicted to excessive drink and was drowned in the Kallada river in 1685<sup>105</sup>. In the same year two Jacobite bishops, John and Basil, arrived in Malabar and tried to propagate some strange doctrines among the followers of Thomas<sup>106</sup>.

Thomas II was succeeded by Thomas III, who governed only two years. In 1688 Thomas IV assumed the dignity of a bishop. He made sincere attempts to reunite his followers with the Catholic Church<sup>107</sup>. When they failed he turned to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch to whom he wrote two letters in 1709 and in 1720<sup>108</sup>. He died in 1727<sup>109</sup>.

During the reign of Thomas V (1727-1765), in 1751, there came to Malabar Mar Basilius, Mar Gregorius, Ramban John and two clerics sent by the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. In 1752 Mar Basilius consecrated Ramban John as Mar Ivanos and appointed him Metropolitan. Thomas protested. In 1765 Thomas VI succeeded Thomas V. He was consecrated by Mar Gregorius at Niranim in 1772 and took the name Mar Dionisius I<sup>110</sup>. He was the first validly consecrated bishop among the successors of Archdeacon Thomas. With Dionisius I a new period began in the Jacobite Church of Malabar. The Jacobite Church in Malabar was now endowed with a valid episcopacy and it gave the Church a stability and autonomy.

104) APF CP 30, f. 336.

105) CP 30, f. 267.

106) Paulinus a S. Bartholomeo, *India Orientalis Christiana* Roma, 1794, p. 106; Brown, L. W., *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge, 1956, p. 112.

107) AGOCD 266i, ff. 722-723.

108) APF SOCG 578, f. 493; SOCG 654, ff. 412, 414.

109) AGOCD 265a, f. 292.

110) Malancharuvil C., *The Syro-Malankara Church*, Alwaye, 1973, p. 37.

In 1808 Thomas VII succeeded Dionisius I and governed the Jacobites for a year. In 1809 Thomas VIII was installed as bishop, and he was succeeded by Thomas IX in 1815. In the same year, an influential priest, Pulikkottil Joseph, was consecrated bishop as Dionisius II by Mar Philexinos, bishop of Anjoor. He, then, deposed Thomas IX with the help of the government and substituted himself in the latter's place. Dionisius III succeeded him in 1818. During his time the Anglican missionaries tried to disseminate their doctrines among the Jacobites. After the death of Dionisius III in 1825, Mar Dionisius IV was consecrated bishop by the bishop of Anjoor. From the Jacobite Patriarch, he obtained Mar Athanasius to oppose the Anglicans. Athanasius, however, sought means of deposing Dionisius IV and the bishop of Anjoor, and of becoming the bishop of the Jacobites in Malabar<sup>111</sup>.

The Anglican influence among the Jacobites was increasing day by day. Dionisius IV, therefore, officially acknowledged the jurisdiction of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch over the Malabar Jacobite Church in order to be free of the Anglicans<sup>112</sup>. But there were some who wanted to reform the Jacobite Church on the basis of Anglican doctrines and practices. They sent a deacon, Mathew, to the Jacobite Patriarch who consecrated him Mathew Mar Athanasius. Mathew reached Malabar in 1843 and proclaimed himself the bishop of all the Jacobites of Malabar<sup>113</sup>. Dionisius informed the Patriarch of the situation in Malabar. The Patriarch sent Mar Kurillos to make an enquiry about Mathew. Dionisius IV stepped down in favour of Kurillos. Since the government was against him, Kurillos left Malabar. Dionisius died in 1855<sup>114</sup>.

In the meantime Pulikottil Joseph, a Jacobite priest, was sent to the Patriarch. He was consecrated Dionisius V. Dionisius V came back to Malabar with his credentials in 1865. During his time, in 1875, the Patriarch of Antioch Peter III Ignatius visited Malabar and excommunicated Mathew Mar Athanasius. He held a synod at Mulanthuruthy in 1876 and consecrated six

111) Podipara P. J., *The Thomas Christians*, Bombay, 1970, p. 220.

112) Malancharuvil C., *op. cit.* pp. 49-59.

113) Podipara P. J., *op. cit.*, pp. 220-221.

114) *Ibid.*, p. 221.

more metropolitans, dividing Malabar into seven eparchies. Dionisius acted as the head of these metropolitans<sup>115</sup>. Thus the Jacobites of Malabar were brought under the Patriarch of Antioch.

In 1909 Mar Dionisius VI succeeded Dionisius V. During his time the Antiochean Patriarch, Abdulla II, visited Malabar and demanded that all the bishops should acknowledge his supremacy over the temporalities of the church<sup>116</sup>. This caused a dispute between the Jacobite church in Malabar and the Antiochean Patriarchate with regard to the nature and extension of the power of the latter over the former. Dionisius VI acknowledged a certain spiritual supremacy, i. e. consecration of bishops, and of the holy chrism and the Patriarch's right to a general supervision of the Jacobite Church but not his temporal control. A result of the dispute was that the Jacobites in Malabar were divided into two parties. The dispute reached its climax on May 31, 1911, when the Patriarch Abdulla excommunicated Dionisius VI. In a synod at aiwaye on August 30. 1911, the Patriarch appointed Mar Kurillos Metropolitan in the place of Dionisius VI<sup>117</sup>.

Mar Dionisius VI and his followers, for their part, tried to secure independence for their Church through the institution of a Catholicate. They, Therefore, wrote to Mar Abdal Messiah, Patriarch expelled by the Turkish government, inviting him to Malabar. Abdal Messiah arrived in Malabar in 1912 and restored the Catholicate. From this time the Jacobites were explicitly divided into two parties, one acknowledging a certain degree of spiritual supremacy of the Antiochean Patriarch, and the other completely accepting his supremacy both in spiritual and in temporal matters<sup>118</sup>.

Several attempts were made to reconcile the two parties. In 1931 Mar Elias, the Antiochean Patriarch, visited Maabar He absolved Dionisius from excommunication. He tried to effect a reconciliation, but his sudden death hindered its progress<sup>119</sup>.

115) Malancharuvil C., op. cit., pp. 58-64.

116) Ibid., p. 65.

117) Ibid. pp. 65-66.

118) Ibid., p. 68-70.

119) Ibid., p. 70.

During the time of Patriarch Mar Ephrem I, the Catholicos, Basilius II, tried in vain to effect a reconciliation between the two parties<sup>120</sup>. The attempts at reconciliation having failed, the Catholicos party, in 1934, formally declared its independence, codifying a new constitution for their Church which was called the 'Orthodox Syrian Church'<sup>121</sup>.

On 3 January 1958 the two parties made a compromise. They are, however, again divided.

### **The Independent Syrian Church of Malabar (Anjoorians)**

This church had its origin in 1772 when Mar Gregorius consecrated Mar Kurillos without the knowledge and consent of the then Jacobite bishop Dionisius I. Kurillose began to govern the Jacobites. He was expelled with the help of the government. He, then, escaped to Anjoor and founded an independent church<sup>122</sup>. Followers adopted the West Syrian Rite and are now called the Independent Church of Malabar. On August 28, 1977, their bishop, Paulus Mar Philexinos, entered the Catholic Church.

### **Marthomites**

While the Jacobites in Malabar were dealt with, a certain Mathew Mar Athanasius, who was consecrated in 1843, was mentioned. He tried to introduce reforms inspired by Anglican doctrines, and was excommunicated in 1875. Mathew and his followers then formed a new church. Known, at first as the 'Re-formed Jacobites' they eventually assumed the name of 'Marthomites'.

### **The Church of the East**

This had its origin in the Chaldean bishop Mellus who arrived in Malabar in 1874. Some thirtytwo churches followed him, and he set up his headquarters in Trichur. Mellus was excommunicated, and was forced to go back in 1882. He entrusted his followers to Bishop Antony Thondanatt (Abdiso). After the

120) Philip E. M., *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*, (2nd ed.) Kottayam, 1951, p. 546.

121) Malancharuvil C., *op. cit.*, p. 70.

122) Podipara P. J. *op. cit.*, p. 226.

death of Abdiso in 1900, the Mellusians had no bishop till 1908. Then, a foreign bishop, Abimelech Mar Thimotheus, ruled over them till 1945. During his time they split into two groups, i. e. the Independents and the Surays. The Independents finally embraced Catholicism. The Surays remain independent, accepting the East Syrian Rite as practised by the Nestorians<sup>123</sup>.

## V

### Attempts at reunion

Right from the time of the original division there were attempts at reunion from both sides. Archdeacon Thomas's demand was that he should be consecrated validly. It was thought that this would restore the ancient rite and traditions of the Thomas Christians, which had been replaced by Latin ones. The attempts at reunion became successful only in 1930. Only the main attempts at reunion with the Catholic Church will be taken up now.

#### **1. Mar Thomas IV (1688–1727)**

On 7 December 1704 Thomas IV and his followers sent a petition to the Pope requesting him to accept them into the Catholic Church. It was signed by twelve priests and twenty-nine laymen<sup>124</sup>. The Catholics also favoured it<sup>125</sup>. The Carmelites were entrusted with presenting the petition to the Pope. Nothing further is known about the negotiations. Either the Carmelites did not take them seriously or Rome did not take any step because of unfavourable reports from missionaries about the reunion.

#### **2. Mar Thomas V (1727–1765)**

In 1748 Thomas V sent a petition to Pope Benedict XIV requesting him to receive him into the Catholic Church. He expressed his desire to keep up the Syrian tradition and rite<sup>126</sup>. Since the missionaries were against it, this attempt, also failed.

#### **3. Mar Thomas VI alias Dionisius I (1765–1808)**

After his enthronement as bishop, Dionisius began negotiations with Rome. The Carmelites were against his reunion with

123) Podipara P. J., *The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church*, op. cit., pp. 170–171.

124) AGOCD, 266*i*, ff. 722–723.

125) APF SOCP 23, ff. 182–183.

126) APF SOCP 109, f. 114.

jurisdiction over his people, because they feared that it would weaken their authority in Malabar. Since the Carmelites were of no help the Christians decided to take the matter directly to Rome. Accordingly Frs. Joseph Cariattil and Thomas Paremmackal were sent to Rome with petitions<sup>127</sup>. On their way they landed in Lisbon and submitted a petition to the Queen of Portugal for a bishop and an archdeacon for the Malabar Church. In Rome their request was not favourably considered because the missionaries did not favour the idea of granting independent jurisdiction to Mar Dionisius over his people<sup>128</sup>. Frs. Cariattil and Paremmackal returned to Lisbon and there Cariattil was consecrated Archbishop of Cranganore. He was also given the faculty to receive Dionisius I into the Catholic Church. But on their return to Malabar Archbishop Cariattil died at Goa on 10th September 1786<sup>129</sup>.

After the death of Archbishop Cariattil, Dionisius continued his attempts at reunion through the bishop of Cochin. In April 1791 he made arrangements with the bishop for a united catholic community making reforms in their rite<sup>130</sup>. But owing to the intervention of the missionaries the whole affair ended in failure.

In spite of all these difficulties Dionisius I re-entered the Catholic Church on June 21, 1799, at an unauthorized meeting. He also made the profession of faith according to the formula of Urban VIII. He promised to remit a sum of money to the Travancore government if he reverted to Jacobitism. But no one, neither the Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, nor the Bishop of Cochin, was ready to receive him legally. After six months he returned to Jacobitism and remitted the stipulated sum to the Travencore government<sup>131</sup>.

#### 4. Mar Dionisius V (1865–1908)

Dionisius V approached the then Apostolic Delegate Ajuti about the reunion. In his attempt he was helped by Fr. Mani Nidhiri. He even visited the Apostolic Delegate for this purpose, but his efforts also came to nothing<sup>132</sup>.

127) APF SC (IOC) 35, ff. 633–636; 39, ff. 10–13.

128) SOCG 867, ff. 154–181.

129) Placid P. J. Hierarchy ... op. cit., p. 150.

130) Malancharuvil C., op. cit., p. 118.

131) Inchalackalody T., Mar Ivanios, Trivandrum, 1957, p. 226.

132) Malancharuvil C., op. cit., p. 119–120.

## 5. The final outcome of the attempts at reunion (1930)

It was in the time of Mar Dionisius VI (1908–1935) that a few Jacobites under Mar Ivanios, Archbishop of Bethany, returned to the Catholic Church. Mar Ivanios with the consent of Dionisius, first started correspondence with the Catholic Patriarch of Antioch. Later he began to correspond directly with Rome. The Holy See considered the matter favourably and on July 4, 1930, the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches took the final decision with regard to the reunion of the Jacobites in Malabar. On September 20, 1930, Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilus, Bishop of Thiruvalla, together with representatives of their followers, were received into the Catholic Church before Mgr. Benziger O.C.D., Bishop of Quilon<sup>133</sup>. The reunited bishops were received with full recognition of their episcopal dignity and jurisdiction. On June 11, 1932, Pope Pius XII by the Apostolic Constitution "Christo Pastorum Principi"<sup>134</sup> constituted the Syro-Malankara hierarchy

### Conclusion

When the Portuguese arrived in India there was only one Church in India, an Individual Church with its Indo-Oriental identity. The Latinization of this Church began with Synod of Diamper in 1599. Though this was not the spirit of the universal Church it was the general tendency at that time. The outcome was tragic; the single Individual Church was divided into different denominations, jurisdictions and rites.

We have to accept the fact that now in India there exist Christians of different denominations and rites. But we are all one in Christ. History teaches us that we were one and how we were divided. There is no reason to quarrel over this, nor is it anything to boast about. Accepting the truth and the reality of the Indian Church as existing today, we have to rise above our divisions. The spirit of power and domination divided and disfigured our Church. Genuine Christian love and the spirit of cooperation should bring us together, while maintaining the legitimate diversity.

Thomas Pallipurathukunnel

133) Inchalackalody, op. cit., pp. 441–443.

134) Malancharuvil C., op. cit., p. 132.

# Discussion Forum

In *Jeevadharma* 37 (pp.17-85) an article was published, entitled "Alienation or Liberation? Towards an Evaluation of the History of Christianity in India" by John Arakkal, M. V. Cyriac and Abraham Koothottil. The following is a comment on the article by P. T. Chacko.

General Editor

## THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA (A personal statement based on certain philosophical consideration)

### Introduction

In presenting their thesis (for that it is) the authors have tried to follow the most rigorous criteria of modern western historiography. It is admitted, on all sides, that the South Indian apostolate of St. Thomas is a fact not confirmed or corroborated by any contemporary historical records or documents, nor does it find any lateral support in the so-called auxiliary science of history like archaeology, epigraphy or numismatics. And so what? The fact that historical documents do not exist to corroborate or certify an event presumed to have taken place in the past, does not *eo ipso* deny the occurrence of that event. What Edward Schillebeeckx says in his recent Jesus book is perhaps relevant here also. 'Events that have taken place are larger and wider than those which can be historically proved' (*Geschehene Realität ist weiter als das was die Geschichte davon ergibt und kann*).<sup>1</sup> But this is only one extreme possibility. In fact

1. Schillebeecks: *Jesus, Die Geschichte von einem Lebenden* (Wien 1976) p. 58.

the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas is not so deplorably deficient in historical corroboration, as its opponents picture or caricature it to be. The fact is that they are not ready or willing to consider the evidence. Their refusal is based on certain methodological premises adopted by these writers. These premises relate to the nature, status and validity of historical knowledge. They also relate to certain problems professedly treated in modern manuals of hermeneutics and scientific historiography. In the following pages I shall address myself to some of these problems in a very sketchy manner. But before doing so, I would like to summarise for the hasty reader the types of evidence, historical and otherwise, at present available, for proving the authenticity of the traditions relating to the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas.

### Evidence for the apostolate

- 1) The first piece of evidence is an apocryphal book named *Acts of Thomas*. It was written in Syria probably in the third century. It explicitly mentions the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. It is not a historical piece of writing but many modern scholars express the view that there is a solid nucleus of historical truth in it. The recognition of this minimal or nuclear historicity has been facilitated by the unearthing of a number of coins in North-West India. These coins bear the name of a certain king Gondophorus (varied spellings) who is mentioned several times in the *Acts of Thomas*.
- 2) The traditions of the various Eastern Churches cannot be ignored. The Syrian, Greek and Mesopotomian Churches know of the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas.
- 3) A number of eminent ecclesiastical writers and Fathers of the Church mention this fact in their writings. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ephrem, Ambrose, Gregory of Nazianus, Isidore of Seville, Eusebius, Arnobius, Gandentius, Jacob of Zarug, Paulinus, Gregory of Tours and John of Salba are some of them.
- 4) Then there are the reports of famous travellers like cosmos who mention the existence of early Christian communities in Malabar in the third century.
- 5) The tomb of St. Thomas in Mylapore and the traditions relating to it deserve special mention. The antiquity of this tomb dates back to the first century.
- 6) The presence of a metropolitan bishop of the See of St. Thomas and of greater India in the Council of Nicaea has also to be considered (325 A. D.)
- 7) Above all we have the evidence of the living and flourishing tradition of a great Christian com-

munity in the southern part of India. The Kerala tradition about the apostolate of St. Thomas comprises the following elements: a) the seven Churches believed to have been built by the apostle, b) the various popular songs describing the apostolic activities and martyrdom of the saint, c) the liturgical practice of Kerala Christians. 8) Finally we have the opinions of competent and celebrated historians who also believe in the Indian apostolate of the saint. Some of them are Vincent Smith, Cunningham, Renand, Schurhammer, and Buchanan, all of them Westerners. There are also the confirming conclusions of Indian and Kerala historians like Nehru, Padmanabhan, M. O. Joseph P. J. Thomas and Podipara.

A word now about the evaluation of this evidence. No part of it is conclusive or compelling in itself. But taken all together it has a sufficient probative value towards the reasonableness and wellgroundedness of our position. It is also to be noted that there are many well-known scholars who deny outright the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. They too must have been studying and examining the same documents and traditions as Tisserant or Vincent Smith rely on. Some therefore decide to 'believe' the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas, while others, for equally valid reasons, decide to deny it. If this is the case we have the right to enquire into the role of personal decision, preference, objectivity and subjectivity in the field of historical study. We have also to delve into the questions of truth and certainty in matters of historical knowledge. The probative value of non-historical traditions may also be of interest to us in this context. In the following paragraphs we shall try to look more closely into some of these questions and problems.

### **Historical positivism and the fetishism of facts**

After the age of Herodotus, Thucydides and Hellanicos, it was only in the 19th century that the study of history began to be established on a really scientific basis. The 19th century is in Europe the age of towering historiographers like Ranke, Niebuhr, Acton, Mommsen, etc. Their approach to history is usually known as historical positivism or historicism. It was the great historian Ranke who was responsible for setting the tone for this approach. For him and his followers history is based

purely and entirely on facts. Ranke wanted to know past events in the way and manner in which they really happened (or to quote his famous German words 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist'). He would like to have nothing more nor less from history. As the English historian E. H. Carr points out (this author is frequently quoted in the following paragraphs) Ranke, like Gradgrind in Dickens's novel *Hard Times*, wanted facts and facts alone in life.<sup>2</sup> Ranke was too much in revolt against the moralising type of history prevalent in his time. Hence his reaction was to a certain extent justifiable. But reactions in history (as contrasted with their occurrence in nature) need not be equal and opposite to the corresponding action. It can be much, and sometimes too much, exaggerated. As Carr again points out, "three generations of British, German and even French historians have marched into battle intoning the magic words, 'wie es agentlich gewesen ist' like an incantation.... to save themselves from the tiresome obligation to think for themselves". They never paused to ponder about the true nature of facts as such, let alone historical facts, and the result has been what later historiographers have so aptly called the 'fetishism or cult of facts'. In Britain this cult of facts fitted in perfectly with the empiricist tradition of British philosophy. The empirical theory of knowledge is based upon a complete separation between subject and object. A historical fact is considered by the positivists as entirely independent of the historian who studies it. This view is today radically questioned by those who are opposed to positivism in history. More will be said about them presently. Meanwhile let us examine the nature of facts in some detail.

There are two kinds of facts with which we are immediately concerned, the natural and the historical. A fact is a datum given to us directly or indirectly in experience. A natural or material fact is a datum disclosed by experience and interpreted as some aspect of a material object or event. The facts studied by science are observed facts.<sup>3</sup> James Fableman speaks of five types of observed facts. We are not here concerned with this classification. But we have to bear in mind the basic trait of natural or scientific

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2. E. H. E. H. Carr: *What is history?* (Pelican 1964) p. 8.

3. Fablemann, *Scientific Method* (The Hague 1972) p. 46.

facts. They are capable of being repeatedly observed. Observation in science is different from observation in ordinary life. In science it involves the repeated production of the facts, their measurement, weighing, etc. In other words, observation in science is 'trained', while in actual everyday life it is 'simple'.

The original sin of historical positivism lies in the reductionism of its approach to historical facts. Positivism reduces historical facts to the natural. In science, observation has to be kept independent of all extraneous and subjective conditions, but this is impossible in history. The historical fact needs interpretation and comprehension (of course scientific facts also need a minimum of interpretation). More than in science, this requires insight, sympathy and imagination on the part of the historiographer. This is something which the positivist finds difficult to understand or admit. Carl Hempel, for example, has written a celebrated essay on the 'Function of General Laws in History'.<sup>4</sup> There he maintains that historical explanation is in no way different from scientific explanation. This means that he finds no difference between the natural and the historical facts.

The crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar has been frequently quoted as the classical instance of a historical fact. But there is nothing in it that is intrinsically important which raises it to the status of a historical fact. This insignificant fact has become historical as the result of an *a priori* decision taken by a historian. It is the historian who selects and arranges the appropriate facts. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them. If sociology is what sociologists do, and 'philosophy what philosophers do',<sup>5</sup> then surely history is also to a very large extent what the historians are doing. A book of history is a series of accepted judgements by a certain historian – based on facts, of course. To many this may sound silly and a little scandalous, but we cannot escape this conclusion.

The fetishism of facts is also accompanied by a fetishism of documents'. The reverent historian (of the positivist-school)

4. Carl Hempel quoted by Ricoeur in his article 'expliques et comprendre'.

5. Leslie Dewart: *Foundations of belief* (London 1969) p. 508.

approached them with bowed head and spoke of them in awed tones. But here too we cannot ignore one basic exigency – these documents have to be processed by the historian before he can make any use of them.

### **Historical objectivity: the new approach**

The new approach to history is characterised by a strong reaction against positivism and its dry-as-dust historiography. The philosophical reflections of eminent thinkers like Dilthey, Riekert, Weber, Scheler, Collingwood, Marrou, Aron and Carr have contributed towards the development of this new approach. Karl Rahner in a recent book feels himself compelled to stress the fact that human history is not based on physical space-time but is the very transcendental experience of man<sup>6</sup>. It is transcendental because it belongs to the necessary structure of the human subject. The human subject understands itself through its understanding of others. The two sorts of comprehensions cannot be completely separated. Paul Ricoeur therefore points out that history is an extension of the understanding we have of other people.<sup>7</sup> This understanding (implied in historical knowledge) is therefore inseparable from our self-understanding (auto-comprehension). This is why Marrou says explicitly that history is inseparable from the historian.<sup>8</sup> History is not mere objective knowledge as the physical sciences are, whatever Hempel and others might say. Historical knowledge is 'cultural knowledge'.<sup>9</sup> It is, as Max Scheler says so beautifully, a form of knowledge which is completely assimilated and digested, which has become the very life of the historian. As distinguished from a mere knowledge of facts, it involves a subjective and hence transcendental experience, though historical experience as such is acquired (Meinong). This cultural knowledge has become a second nature for the historian according to William James. All these varied observations are intended to drive home to the serious student of history the irrefutable fact that we cannot separate the historian from his historical work or enquiry. In other words the type of

6. Rahner: *Grunkurs des Glaubens* (Herder 1076) p. 145.

7. Ricoeur in the article *Expliques et comprendre* (*Revue philosophique de Louvain*).

8. Marrou: *De la connaissance historique* (Paris 1964) p. 180.

9. Scheler: *L'homme et l'histoire* (Paris 1955 p. 150).

objectivity obtaining in history is different from that which dominates the physical or natural sciences.

All history is contemporary history according to Benedetto Croce. This 'contemporaneity' has a double basis. When we are reading a book of history we are confronted with the present thought of the historian about a past event. Secondly, history always refers to the present needs and situations where the past events vibrate (Croce). A purely objective approach to history is incapable of bringing to light this contemporary nature of all true historical studies.

Historical objectivity is the correlative of the subjectivity of the historian, to refer to Recoeur again. It is not correlated to the subjectivity of any person whatsoever but to that of the historian who has acquired his historical knowledge in a systematic and scientific way. We point this out in order to rule out any misconception about the role of subjectivity in the study of history. In the study of natural facts the subjectivity of the scientist has practically no role at all to play—even in quantum physics. Hence the type of objectivity that characterises physical science is totally independent of the subjectivity of the scientist. This cannot be the case in the social sciences. But the intrusion of purely 'subjective' factors can be avoided to a very large extent by proper scientific training and competence. That is why the role of the historian's subjectivity has been stressed here. Subjectivism and relativism are real risks in any social science. What we can try to do is to keep them within permissible limits.

This brings immediately to the fore the question of the permissible limits of historical objectivity. The historian must be conscious of his limits. There are no omniscient or universal historians. They can only be selective. They have to omit many things and concentrate on certain others. This is why Lytton Strachey pointed out ignorance as the first requisite of the historian and why Scheler would qualify this as not mere ignorance but *docta ignorantia*. Scheler advises the historian to be self-effacing, discreet, humble, and simple. But with this we are already in the realm of moralisation and it is better to stop there.

The true historian, not the text-book writer, needs some degree of creativity and originality. The true historian does not

merely reproduce past events like the text-book writers. He reconstructs them (the expression is Raymond A. Ron's). And in the process of this reconstruction the historian puts something of his own into what he reconstructs. The building materials—stone, mortar, cement, wood, etc., namely the facts of history, may be similar and common between two historians, but the style of construction will certainly vary. Catholic and Protestant historians will not view the Reformation through the same perspective, Soviet historians will differ from their American counterparts about the significance of the October Revolution. Robespierrians and Dantonians will adopt different positions regarding the French Revolution, and so on and so forth. All these illustrate Aron's famous dictum that 'theory precedes history'. In the 19th century, historians were not very conscious of the value of the philosophy of history. Today we know very well that every historian worth his salt has his own philosophical view concerning not only the meaning of history but also its methodology and the epistemological premises underlying his own historical knowledge. Marrou quotes the Soviet historian Prokovsky to the effect that 'history is the projection into the past of one's own political options'. George Gurvitch is a more impartial scholar and sociologist, but he too does not hesitate to point out that 'historical truth is ideological and partisan without being subjective'. These observations and quotations are not intended to make the reader panicky about the objectivity of history. They should however make him prudent. He should always have a grain of salt with him when consuming historical stuff.

### **Historical truth and certainty**

The foregoing observations should not therefore lead to any hasty conclusion that all historical judgements are purely subjective and arbitrary. The ultimate guarantee for the validity and truth of historical judgements is the integrity and competence of the historian, and this can vary from man to man. Historical truth is not something which is verifiable by direct perception or through experimentation in a laboratory. But as a systematic pursuit of knowledge history can also claim a 'certain minimum of validity' independent of all philosophical or subjective considerations. It will be our endeavour now to grasp the nature of this minimum validity in historical knowledge.

'History' in the words of Simiand 'is a knowledge by traces'. We do not perceive directly the faces or profiles of those who have preceded us in life, but we can try to understand something about them from the footprints they have left on the sands of time. History begins where immediate or direct perception ends. It is therefore a form of indirect knowledge. History being a form of knowledge concerning the free action of human beings, we cannot resort to mathematical or logical deduction to arrive at truths of history. Nor is experimental verification possible in this field. No one can now go back to the year 1815 to witness personally the historic battle Waterloo being fought between the French and the British armies. We have only the testimony of certain historians or chronicles to lead us to a certain knowledge about these events. Hence historical certainty is only moral, not mathematical. We can only say that it is morally certain, or highly probable, that the battle of Waterloo was fought in the year 1815, or that Napoleon lived in France in the 19th century. There are historians who can present us with documents which purport to prove that a man named Napoleon never existed. Historiography can provide us with moral or probable certainty. As Marrou puts it, 'historical reason is situated on the level of the possible'. This also accounts for the fact that historical truths are only partial and schematic and, to a certain extent, abstract. Raymond Aron would not even hesitate to assert that historical pictures — descriptions — are ideal or even idealised.<sup>11</sup> With the result that no historical description can present us with a complete picture of the reality or event which is being for the moment described.

As judgements in history are probable, and as the certainty that accompanies them is only moral there can be no necessary truths in history. Nothing necessitated the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar; it is not necessarily true that St. Thomas came to India. But here again we have to be careful not to slip into the pitfalls of extreme scepticism. The words of Herbert Butterfield may be aptly recalled here: 'in a great deal of historical work mere scepticism carries us nowhere and everything depends, in the last resort, on the very delicate balancing of the mind as it makes — an act of judgement... In reality there are reasons

why we ought to have a great respect for ancient studies<sup>10</sup>. 'A hypercritical attitude' says Marrou, 'is equivalent to an obstination in incredulity'. The same author would rather point out that historical truths are useful to those who want them. This type of 'voluntarism' might again seem to damage historical objectivity to a very large extent. Hence we shall try to explain the problem a little more clearly.

### The role of decision and faith

It is the considered opinion of many modern philosophers of history that historical comprehension is ultimately based on personal decision and faith. Positivists may very well consider this attitude as the 'ultima thule' of historical subjectivism. We have no intention to exorcise their minds of such a baseless misconception but some useful clarifications can however be provided. I may read a hundred books of history dealing with the French Revolution. Some of them may have totally unfavourable and unsympathetic attitudes to the event; some of them may be very favourable and enthusiastic. Dantonians and Robespierrians, Burkes and Michelets, vie for my approval or disapproval. Finally I have to adopt an attitude. I may say, 'Such colossal destruction, massacre and bloodshed was really unnecessary and even unjustified'. But my colleague who has read the same volumes might say, 'The French Revolution inaugurated a new era in human history' etc., etc. Or take the case of the Indian struggle for independence, or the Russian revolution, or the American Civil War. There can always be a number of attitudes concerning these events. Such attitudes are taken on the basis of personal decisions and we have no right to question them. A total comprehension always needs a decision. while the mere collecting of facts or the scanning of documents does not compel us to arrive at any similar attitude. It is after examining all the relevant documents that the Catholic historian begins to find fault with Luther and his followers for the Reformation. It is after looking into the same documents that the Protestant historian begins to laud Luther and his followers to the skies

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10. Butterfield: *Christianity and History* (Fontana 1960) p. 31

for their splendid achievements. Whom should we believe in such a circumstance? Only a personal decision can clinch the issue.

Here again comes in the issue of the importance of historical faith. All witnesses and documents in history can be questioned or contested because all of them are human. There is nothing in man that compels him to assert truths only. He can deceive or dupe us for the flimsiest of reasons. And yet we believe the reports and descriptions of most of our historians. Mind you, I said, "we believe the historians". History cannot do without personal decision and belief. In the physical science this is not needed because for the majority of phenomena there can be direct verification. But we can never directly verify the reports of the Gospels concerning Christ or the assertions of Plutarch about his heroes. Christians believe in the historical Jesus because they decide to believe in the historicity of the Gospels. There are many who cannot come to such a decision and blatantly assert that the Gospel stories are mere mythology. Christians believe in the Gospels not only because, by their own conceptions of the standards of historiographical objectivity, they are true reports, but also because the faith in Christ is useful to them and wanted by them. I would in this context refer to two important articles concerning the role of historical faith, one by Marrou in *Les études philosophiques* entitled 'Foi historique', and the other by G. Lafon in *Revue théologique de Louvain* under the title "Raison de Foi en Jesus".

### The role of tradition

Lastly something should be said about the role of tradition in the matter of our beliefs. For those who are acquainted with modern hermeneutics the epoch-making work of H. G. Gadamer *Wahrheit und Methode*, (first published in 1960) is recommended. There are many positivist historians who cavil at the role of tradition in the matter of our beliefs: Gadamer in his work points out that history is based on interpretation, and that this interpretation and the consequent comprehension are themselves subject to the laws of human historicity. If human comprehension itself is historical, if it cannot escape the servitudes and vicissitudes of history, it is

vain for the historian to try to soar above these human limitations in the hope of attaining some super-human objectivity. Gadamer then points out the role of tradition in the process of interpretation. These traditions have their roots in the cultural and social history of a people. Ofcourse, the scientific historian has the duty to examine them carefully, but it is always dangerous to ignore or discard great and living traditions merely in the name of some sort of suprascientific and mathematically rigorous historiography. Paul Ricoeur refers to the historicity of events which are happily termed 'foundational' such as Israel's crossing of the Red sea or the entry into Canaan. They cannot be historically proved now but it is totally unjustified on our part to question them on that account.

### **Early Christian history**

Those who would demand of us irrefragable and irrefutable historical documents to prove the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas could be courteously requested to adduce sufficient and scientifically valid evidence to prove the apostolic activities of the other apostles like Peter, Matthew, John or Andrew or even of Paul, and also the early history of the various Christian Churches etc. What is the type of evidence available to us concerning the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome? What about the activities of St. Peter as the first Pope? What can be said about the early history of the various sacraments and other liturgical practice? It is well known that the history of the Church, in the early first and second centuries at least, is very obscure and almost inaccessible through contemporary documents. We rely on local traditions and customs for what we know about them today and nobody finds anything strange in this practice. A good number of Italian catholics still believe that the earthly habitation of the Holy Family was bodily lifted up, lock, stock and barrel, by the angelic hosts and deposited safely on their soil for the edification and benefit of untold millions of tourists and pilgrims that flock to Loretto every year. The Westerner will still believe that Lazarus, recently resurrected from his dreary cavern, sailed to Marseilles and ruled over the place as its bishop for a long time. But when the Kerala Christians assert their belief in the historicity of St. Thomas's Indian apostolate, these hypercritical historiographies of the West and their Eastern admirers cannot hold back their

derision and dismay, or help laughing in their sleeves and calling for evidence for the belief. I have described, in these pages, the latest conclusions of western historiography and hermeneutics, so that by his own standards, the Westerner may stand condemned for this highly sceptical attitude toward this dearly cherished belief of Indian Catholics. At least they should not adopt a double measure in such matters.

### A personal statement

I am fully conscious of the fact that the most tremendous weapons of modern scientific historiography can be wielded against me and my countrymen for our belief in the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. The article of the Kerala priests referred to at the beginning of this one, is only the thin end of the wedge. For my part I believe in the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas not only because I 'want' to believe it as a matter of personal allegiance to that great apostle and his divine master, but also because I have sufficient historical grounds on which to validate and base this belief of mine. If there are formidable historians (whose tribe may still increase) who can instil trepidation into me by the carnage they can commit in destroying the very foundation of my belief in the early work of St. Thomas, I am at the same time considerably heartened and encouraged by the outstanding achievements of equally great historians like Vincent Smith, Cunningham (or Tisserant) who have 'decided' to uphold the veracity of this apostolate. But it is not merely on the basis of the works of a few historians that I cleave to this dear belief of mine. The whole Christian community of which I am a part has been holding to this tradition and remaining firmly rooted in it, for the last two thousand years. It is immaterial whether the contemporary converts of St. Thomas in their pristine fervour and enthusiasm, cared or did not care to commit this foundational event to writing on papyrus, parchment or vellum. It is enough that the belief now runs through the very veins of millions of Catholics of this ancient land and is part of their very blood stream. This belief is dearer to us than the dearest of our worldly possessions. The long-standing traditions of many Eastern Churches and Church fathers, the many and varied monuments erected to commemorate this event in the very first centuries, the tomb at Mylapore and the traditions surrounding it, the minimum of historical truth contained

in the Acts of Thomas together with the considered conclusions of eminent historians and the long and living tradition of my countrymen constitute for me a type of evidence that is cumulative, adding strength to this personal belief of mine, which by far surpasses the credibility of reports concerning the apostolate of Lazarus in the precincts of Marseilles or the martyrdom of Peter and Paul on the outskirts of the Roman city. In fact the only disciple of Christ about whose apostolic activities and martyrdom there is any considerable and credible evidence, is St. Thomas. And that is the reason why I consider this belief of mine to be fully justified and validated. The philosophical arguments were adduced only to clarify certain theoretical issues that underlie this attitude. If "all questions of origin are metaphysical in the last analysis", this question of the origin of Christianity in India could also bear some philosophical investigation. But in itself the procedure is only of peripheral importance, and what counts is the personal decision; and that decision, for me, is fully to support the belief in the Indian apostolate of St. Thomas in the first century of our era.

Muvattupuzha

P. T. Chacko

